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THE Wild-Horse Hunters.

BY CAPTAIN MAYNE REID AND
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CHAPTER I. THE MUSTANG-DRIVE.

A DROVE of wild horses, numbering over a hundred head. Of all colors—jet-black and snow-white; bay, sorrel and roan; steel-gray and spotted. They are moving across a prairie—a Texan prairie—near the eastern edge of the “Lower Cross-Timbers,” along the side of a stream that, some ten miles below, becomes tributary to the Trinity river. The banks of the stream are steep and sheer, and the current between runs strong and swift. On that side it

guides the course of the *cavallada*; for the horses will not dare to cross it. On their other flank is the prairie, smooth and open. At intervals they turn their heads toward it, as if desirous of betaking themselves in that direction. Something restrains them; and they continue on down the bank of the stream.

A traveler coming suddenly within sight of this herd, would be struck with a singularity in their appearance and movements. Instead of scouring the plain at a canter, or quick gallop—as is their wont—they are moving at a slow pace. Now and then it livens into a trot, or at times, a brisker walk, as though flies were urging them on. But soon they subside into the old, lagging gait, going on with apparent reluctance.

Under ordinary circumstances, wild horses, when encountered on the prairie, are seen either at rest or in full career—rearing and cavorting, with heads erect, curved necks,

and tails sweeping horizontally behind them. The behavior of the *cavallada* in question is altogether different. There is not a curving neck or raised tail among them. On the contrary, their heads are down and drooping; their eyes dull; their flanks hollow, and their limbs dragging after them, as if each and all had been just loosened out of harness after a prolonged spell of plowing. They looked tired, jaded, dejected. They look as if they were being driven!

And this is just what they are—their drivers appearing in the form of three horsemen, coming up behind, at wide distances apart. Not horsemen either, for the men thus mentioned are mounted on large, strong mules.

To a novice on the Texan prairies, this tableau would appear strange. On first viewing it, he could not give credence to his senses. A herd of wild horses—the wildest and shyest animals in existence—driven tamely along by three men



THERE IS NOW NO TURNING, FOR THE THREE HUNTERS, RAPIDLY CLOSING UP, URGE THEM FROM BEHIND.

mounted upon mules—slow mules, from which, at a single dash, they might escape; and over their own uninclosed, illimitable pastures, where they might retreat to any distance, even beyond the range of vision and the danger of pursuit. It would, indeed, seem incredible. But the explanation is easy.

The men coming behind are *mustangers*—hunters of the wild horse by profession. They know all his haunts and habits, and can make him their captive without using either the rifle or lasso. They have long marked the herd they are now following, and made themselves acquainted with its habitat—its "range" of pasturing, and its places for watering. On a given day they have started it in full chase, themselves following slowly after, each leading two spare mules. The wild horse, when first pursued, does not retreat in a direct line, but in wide, sweeping circles, returning again near to his point of departure. Sometimes he does not even go out of sight, but gallops back, as if moved by a spirit of defiance, or yielding to curiosity. In this way he soon fatigues himself, making fifty miles while the pursuer may have to travel only ten.

The *mustanger*, husbanding the strength of his animals by his provident relays, soon overhauls the herd, starting it off into a fresh run. Again he takes the shorter diagonal, and again comes up with it—repeating the movement until the wild steeds begin to lose spirit under the implacable pursuit. They are by this time beginning to feel fatigued, after having made so many idle and out-of-the-way courses. They are getting hungry, too, in their haste not having been permitted to pasture. They will be thirsty also, and perhaps make a break for some distant watering-place, well known to the *mustanger*, who follows them at his best speed, generally taking a shorter route than they. He sometimes arrives in time to hinder them from drinking, but always to prevent their browsing—or, at least, to filling their bellies.

Once more the pursuit is continued, though now in a more direct line, for the steeds are tired, and have no relish for scampering. They are hungry, too, and try to graze as they move onward. But they are not permitted. While grasping at the herbage beneath their feet, they hear the relentless pursuers behind, who make themselves heard in time, and the grass remains uncropped.

Night comes on. Still, this brings no relief to them—no cessation to that never-ending, never-tiring pursuit. All night long are they compelled to move on, without a moment of rest, and scarce a morsel of food. And when day again breaks over the broad prairie, the hunters are there behind them!

During the whole of another day, and often throughout another night, are they thus forced along. Hungered and thirsting, they have now become jaded and dejected, and can be guided in a given direction almost as easily as a herd of tamed cattle. The *mustangers* know well where to take them, for they have already prepared a place for them. It is a *corral*, or inclosure, cunningly contrived, and often costing weeks of labor to make it ready. The old Virginian snake-fence, strengthened with posts at every angle, is called into requisition to inclose a tract of many acres, with a pond of water inside, the fence supplemented by a steep river-bank, or the escarpment of a cliff. A funnel-shaped entrance points toward the prairie groves or "islands" of timber—which the wild horse will rarely enter—helping out the extension of the diverging lines.

Once inside the corral, the *mustangs* are easily caught and conquered with the lasso. The process is a cruel one; so much so that the wild horse, ever after, at sight of a rawhide rope, will come to hand, and stand trembling before his tamer.

It is a capture of this kind, that is taking place on the banks of the stream leading to the Trinity. It is near its completion, as can be told by the dragging gait of the horses, and their thoroughly submissive demeanor; as also by the gestures of the men behind, every moment growing more earnest and impressive.

In front, there is a *molle*, or island of timber, standing about a hundred yards from the bank of the stream; leaving a space of open prairie between. Toward this opening they are directing the drove; as if to drive them through it.

Again the wild horses make halt. They seem to have suspicions about entering upon such a narrow defile; and show signs of making a break for the outer prairie. But, from that side, they see two of their pursuers approaching, each waving a little flag, with which he is provided. In despair, they turn toward the stream; and

striking into a slow trot, continue on between the wood and the water.

Once beyond the timber, a fence of strong rails, laid zigzag, flanks them on the side of the prairie; and they are driven on, between it and the steep bank. There is now no turning, for the three hunters, rapidly closing up, urge them from behind, with shouts and the waving of their flags.

The fence converges toward the bank, and the passage becomes so narrow, that the *cavallada* gets crowded. But there is an open country beyond; and making through this, they once more break into a feeble gallop, in hopes of at last escaping from their relentless pursuers. Two or three hundred yards, and they only bring their breasts in contact with an obstruction—that same crooked arrangement of split timbers, that has already perplexed them. They press their counters against it; but it is strong, and will not yield. They run around it, neighing wildly. They find no outlet on any side. If they return to that by which they entered, they will find none there; for the *mustangers* have, in the meantime, dismounted from their mules, and from a pile of rails—placed there for the purpose—have completed the inclosure of the corral.

CHAPTER II. CHOOSING A SITE.

"HALT!"

The command came from a tall, military-looking man, of middle age, mounted upon a horse, that in size corresponded to him. It was not addressed to soldiers, but simply to the negro driver of a *Conestoga* wagon; which, drawn by four large mules, was slowly making its way along the smooth level of the prairie.

Colonel William Magoffin was the name of the man who gave the order. Had he been only Mr. Magoffin, he would have said "pull up;" but, being a veteran officer of the Jackson wars, his military habits still adhered to him—along with some of the language to which soldiers are accustomed.

At a sonorous "wo—ha!" from their sable teamster, the mules instantly came to a stand—as did also a similar wagon in its rear, and a "Dearborn," drawn by a pair of light, wiry horses. Two other horsemen, who rode alongside the wagon, halted at the same time; and, soon after, six black pedestrians, driving about a dozen head of cattle, came up in the rear of all.

The spectacle thus presented was one not uncommon upon the prairies—being that of an emigrant party on its way to a new settlement.

However, it was very uncommon—in fact, had never been before seen—in the district where the wagons were now drawn up; for those of Colonel Magoffin were the first whose white tilts had ever gleamed amid the green leaves of these singular groves, known as the "Cross Timbers" of Texas.

That this emigrant party came from some Southern State was evinced by the black teamsters; and, also, the sable pedestrians tending the cattle in the rear. A glance under the canvas of the leading wagon brought to view several female faces, of various hue, ranging from pale saffron to ebony black; and, beside them, half a score other faces of smaller size, betokening the usual accompaniment of "picanninies."

In the "Dearborn," were two young girls, both fair and white—ladies, at a glance. Of the horsemen, one was a man of large frame, and tall as the colonel himself—though his coarser garb, and generally more rugged exterior, bespoke him only a retainer. The other, a young man, who had seen his twentieth year, in his features showed some family resemblance—enough to be taken for his nephew; and such, in reality, he was.

The two female occupants of the traveling-carriage were the colonel's daughter, Tennessee, and niece, Louisiana. The names may sound strange thus bestowed. It is not an uncommon practice, for, among families in the Southern States west, as in the Southern States east, we find young ladies called "Carolina," "Virginia," and even "Florida."

Colonel Magoffin was an old-stock Tennessean, whose father had come into the country with the Robertsons, Bradfords and Hardings; hence the name patriotically given to his bright, fair-haired daughter. His nephew and niece were the children of a sister, who had found a husband and a home further south, in the lovely land of Louisiana. This will explain the darker complexion and more delicate features of the young Creole girl, who called Tennessee Magoffin her cousin; and whose own name in full was Louisiana Dupre.

Despite the variety of individuals composing the emigrant party, there was sufficient homogeneity to show that it was one family, of which Colonel Magoffin was the head.

The spot where they had halted was a level plain, with a gentle declination toward the south; and a surface that looked more like a grand garden of flowers than a stretch of wild, uncultivated prairie. There were copses of timber, standing at some distance apart; for they were still outside the selva of the great grove, known as the Cross Timbers. The copses were the outlying islets that here and there fringe these greater belts of forest-land, extending far across the prairie sea.

"This spot looks like it would do," said the colonel, as soon as the wagons had come to a stop; "I don't see any use in our going further. What do you say, Mr. Strother?"

"Well," replied the individual thus addressed, who was the tall man, habited in copper-colored homespun, with a rifle of six feet over his left shoulder, "I don't see as you can do any better. Thar's a river, out o' which we can draw any amount of water; and thar's plenty o' ground that needs no clarin'—not the stroke o' an ax. Once we've plowed up them weeds, I guess we'll get good cotton out o' it; and," he continued, looking with increased interest across the river, "thar on t'other side ar' plenty o' timber whar there shud be b'ar and deer—to say nothing about squerl and turkey. I guess squire, you can't do better than lo-cate jest whar we've pulled up."

"What do you say, Eugene? The ground looks good, for either cotton or tobacco; and I think we're far enough south for sugar. What's your opinion?"

The speaker turned round to his nephew, who, being a Louisianian, was expected to know all about the soil that would be suitable for the sugar-cane. But Eugene had also turned round, and ridden up to the Dearborn, inside which was something sweeter to his thoughts—his fair cousin, Tennessee.

Baffled, the colonel also approached the wagon, and put the question to all together: how they would like to settle on that spot?

"Charming!" exclaimed the impulsive Tennessee; "we can have splendid bouquets and garlands of flowers—only for the gathering!"

"It is a very beautiful country," simply and quietly remarked her cousin, over whose young face could be detected a shade of melancholy—almost sadness.

"Do you think it will grow sugar, Eugene?" again asked Colonel Magoffin, addressing himself to the elegant young Creole, in sky-blue cottonade, and Panama hat.

"I don't think it would, uncle," was the discouraging answer; "it's a little too far north. But what matters, so long as you can grow cotton? Remember, a pound of cotton is worth more than one of sugar; and here, I think, the chief question will be about transporting the produce to a market."

"That's so," said the colonel. "Well, it'll give us cotton, sure; and corn for the niggers and the horses. Till we can raise our own hog-meat, we must live upon venison, with now and then a bear ham, and a breast of turkey; so that we may be as well off as in the old house in Tennessee."

Magoffin said this with something like a sigh; for he remembered that, in the "old house in Tennessee," he had been surrounded with every comfort, until that time when a too-generous heart, leading to a too-profuse hospitality, had brought the bailiff to his gates, and left him almost landless and niggerless—his attenuated sable following being all that was left of a plantation counting over two hundred hands. Still the new movement was not disagreeable to him, but rather the reverse. He was of that migratory stock who can not dwell contented, except on the furthest frontier. Originally of the East Tennessee settlement, they had gone on to Nashville, in the center—and thence to Memphis in the west. Here again, the houses had become too thick, and the country too closely fenced around them. Therefore, the colonel—though with the loss of over three-fourths of his property—was glad to escape from the so-called increasing civilization, and seek a home in some land where the first fence-rail had not yet been split. He was to find it in the country of the Cross Timbers; and the spot where his wagons had halted seemed the very place he would have chosen for a home.

He chose it.

CHAPTER III.

A COMRADE SUSPECTED.

"I don't like him, Ed; I don't like him. This

chile can't feel a freeze torst that fellur—nohow ye can fix it."

"For that matter, Wash, I don't like him myself. But we agreed to his coming out with us."

"Who agreed? Not me—durned ef I did. Jest t'otherways. I war all ag'in' it. I niver know'd three fellurs go trappin' ur huntin' the-gither, thet thar wa'n't quarrels an' conspirin' among 'em; an' one o' the three war boun' to be in the minority. On the puraira, jest as when you go courtin' a gurl, three's no kumpany. Remember what I tolt ye, that we'd be better to 'a' left him behind, an' let him foller his own trail; but you w'd hev him along."

"I admit I spoke in favor of his coming. He wanted to bad to be with us."

"Not so bad to be 'long w' us in purtick'ler. Twarn't that. Ef this chile ain't mistook, what he wanted wust war to git clear o' the settlements—anyhow, an' anywhar. Thar's some-thin' ag'in' him thar wuss than a due-bill."

"You think so?"

"Sure o't—or next thing to sure. Don't ye recollect, when we wur stayin' in Nacadosh, how fidgety he wur on the arrival o' every party o' emigrants, an' whenever anybody rud up to the tavern? He 'peared to be keepin' a sharp look-out for a bailiff—an' that's jest what he wur doin', I reckon."

"He may have committed a forgery, you think?"

"He's committed wuss than that, I shed say."

"But what makes you fancy so?"

"I've got my reezuns. Men don't ramble in thar sleep—as I've heern him do, more'n onces—because they've wrote thar name whar they hadn't oughter. My word for it, Ed Thornley, thar's blood on that fellur's hands."

"It's a pity we brought him with us. Even if it isn't as you suspect, the suspicion of it makes me feel unpleasant. Besides, he hasn't turned out much of a cheerful companion. After all, it's getting to be ticklish times between us and these Indians. They don't appear to like our horse-hunting about here; and if we should come to have trouble with them, three rifles would be better than two."

"I don't know 'bout that. They mout an' they moutn't. Hain't ye noticed how this kumrade o' ours takes on to thet young savage, Tiger-Tail, an' his Seminoles? Ef it war'n't for the different color o' thar hides, you mout think they wur a kuppel o' born brothers; while all the time the Injun's been sulky an' ugly w' both o' us. Don't like it a bit. This chile hev heer'd o' white rennygades, an' know'd o' some as be-trayed thar kumrades to the Injuns. Sech hev been men as hev committed murder in the settlements, and dasen't go back thar. This fellur mout be one o' the kind; an' I feel sort o' sure he air."

"Still, why should he betray us?"

"Why? Wal, one thing why, we've got a good gatherin' o' hosses now. Our cavyard down among the plantashuns, shed fetch, least-ways, a kuppel o' thousand dollars. We've got enuf to make a trip w' right away. An' yit he ain't a-goin' to the settlements along w' us. I kin tell thet from his talk. He means stayin' out hyar 'mong the Injuns; an' to git well in w' them, he mout take a notion to make 'em a present o' our mustangs. They ked trade 'em off as well as we kin."

"In that case, Wash, the sooner we get off the better. We had best take the horses to Nacogdoches."

"So this chile's been thinkin'; an' I guess I kin tell why you want to go to thet place. Thar's a gurl ye want to see, Ed."

"No, as I assure you; nothing of the kind. Thank my stars, I'm as free of all such entanglements as you yourself, Wash."

"Wal, that's free enuf. This chile hain't hed a scrape w' weemen since he wur ur trappin' 'mong the Crows, an' campin' at Fort Laramie. I hed a squaw thur; an' I swore she shed be the last I'd iver let cling 'onter me. What w' her fondness for *fanfaron* an' rot-gut whisky, she ate an' drunk up the puerceeds o' a hul winter's trappin' on the head-waters o' the Platte. No more squaw wives for me—nor weemen o' any kind."

"Ha! ha!" laughed his younger companion. "Well, that's no reason why we shouldn't soon start for the settlements. There are other pleasures there that I know will attract you."

"Thar's the pleasure o' sellin' our hosses, an' gittin' the shiners for 'em. Soon as we've got this last lot tamed to drivin', we'll start right away for the settlements—whether this fellur go w' us or not. He kin take his choice 'bout thet, an' keep his share o' the hosses. He ain't entitled to a third o' them, by rights; for he

hain't been no great help to us—tuk up as he's ben w' Tiger-Tail an' his brown-skinned beauties. Wag! how I do despise any white man thet puts hisself on an even w' an Injun!"

CHAPTER IV.

AN UNWELCOME SIGHT.

THE conversation detailed in the preceding chapter occurred between two men, mounted on mules, and riding across an open stretch of prairie. They were two of the *mustangers* described as having made a capture of the wild-horse herd, by driving them into a corral. It was just after they had completed the inclosure; and they were now on their way to the hut that served all three as a home, in order to provide ropes, and other gear, for breaking the wild steeds—as also to obtain a fresh supply of provisions. The third had been left by the corral, to see to the captured stock. It was he who had been the subject of their conversation, and was the object of their suspicions.

Their names were, respectively, Edward Thornley and Washington Carrol—or "Wash," as his comrade called him for short. Between them there was almost as much dissimilarity as could be between any two individuals of the same race, engaged in a common calling. Physically, morally, intellectually, were they unlike one another.

Wash Carrol—the elder—was a small man, thin in face, as in person; dark of complexion; tough as tan leather; and tight as strung wire. Although perfectly honest in all dealings with men of his own color, he was not so just when it was a matter between him and *red-skins*—or even the Church; for, in a religious point of view, Wash—or "Old Wash," as his confreres called him—was something of a sinner. He was not so very old—fifty being about the number of winters he could look back upon. He was by no means of comely aspect; and his countenance—though of a cast that bespoke cunning rather than sinister thought—was not improved by the scar of an old cut, that traversed across his left cheek, from mouth to ear. By birth a Tennessean, he had been by profession a trapper; but now that beaver "plew" had fallen to so low a price, he had forsaken the trapper's calling, and taken to that of a *mustanger*. He had spent the latter portion of his life upon the prairies of Texas, in pursuit of this singular occupation.

His comrade was a person of totally different characteristics. A handsome young Virginian, he had strayed down to Texas, and, with Wash, had come out to the Cross Timbers—not so much to make money by following the profession of horse-hunter, as through an innate love of frontier life, and a longing for the adventures that render it attractive, despite its perils and hardships. The present expedition was his first trip upon the prairies. In the romantic old town of Nacogdoches he had made the acquaintance of Carrol; and a bargain of partnership had been struck between them. While preparing to set forth alone, a third individual had presented himself, so earnestly eager to accompany them, that, although the old hunter had at first made objections, his younger and more enthusiastic companion had overruled him, and the stranger-volunteer was accepted.

He was a young man of about the same age as Thornley himself, who gave his name as Louis Lebar, and said he was from the State of Louisiana. He was the one about whose honesty imparted to each other in their conversation. From the first introduction, Wash Carrol had conceived them, and all along felt aversion to the man.

The appearance of Lebar was not in his favor. He was short and thick-set, with shoulders slightly stooping. His complexion was dark as that of a mulatto; and a heavy beard, left to grow at will, made him look still darker. In his eye there was a restlessness, and its glance was, at times, almost wolfish. Carrol's dislike for him had other reasons. He had heard utterances of a compromising kind—mutterings made by the stranger in his sleep—in which occurred the word "murder." Wash, lying awake, and listening, had heard this ominous expression, and drawn from it sinister conclusions.

The two had ceased conversing about him, and were now riding on toward the hut, that for several weeks had served them for a home. It was a rude structure of logs, which they had erected against a rocky bluff, overlooking a branch of the Trinity river—about a mile below the place where they had constructed their corral. They had got near to it, and were riding quickly along the bank of the stream,

when Wash—whose eyes were ever on the alert—suddenly jerked up his mule with the exclamation:

"Look thar!"

"Where?" inquired Thornley.

"Thar, down the bank o' the stream. Don't ye see somethin'?"

"Yes—I see something white, like the canvas of a tent."

"Tent be durned! 'Tain't nothin' o' the kind. It's the tilt o' a waggins."

"A wagon! Out here?"

"It air—dog-gone to it!"

"And if so, why should it displease you to see it?"

"Displeeze! Durn it, I've been runnin' away from that sign all o' my life, an' now, I suppose, I've got to flit furrer. I fust made tracks from near Nashville, whar' this chile war kitteded, to West Tennessee. Thar I war follored by waggins, an' arter them, hosses. Then on to North Mississippi, whar the waggins an' hosses kin clost arter Choctaw Purchase. I then tried Arkansas, on t'other side. No use. Thar, too, soon appeared the cussed waggins, an' claims, an' cabins—an' 'long w' 'em, frame houses. I put off South, fer Loozyanny, on Red River bottom. More waggins, an' more buildin's. Then, by way o' durnier raysort—as the Loozyanny Creoles calls it—struck out hyar, for Texas. What's the use? Thar's the waggins ag'in—cuss it!"

"True; it is a wagon—or two of them, I think. But why should you be vexed at the sight of them? For my part, I feel rather pleased."

"Pleezed! Why? Do you know what them waggins mean?"

"Some party, I presume, traveling over the prairies—perhaps on an exploring expedition."

"On a settlin' expedition! Thet's what they're arter. I kin tell it, by the look o' the hull thing. See yonder! What's them movin' roun' the vehicles! Thar's men on hossback—an' thar's others afoot. An' thar's cows an' children. A party o' emigrants, to a sartanty. I know'd they w'dn't be long, afore they'd find out these Cross Timmer lands—jest the sort fer cotton. Settlers, I'll be boun'; and whar now will go the wild hosses! Ed Thornley, we may as well make up our minds to it. This'll be our last trip o' hoss-huntin' to the Cross Timmers. Take this chile's word for't, in another year thar'll be houses all about hyar—an' towns, too. Durn towns an' houses! Afore eyther o' us goes under, they'll be all over the contynent o' Ameriky. A cuss to it! Most as bad as Methodies, Wag!"

At the commencement of this tirade, the old hunter had pulled up; and, after its conclusion, he sat in his saddle scrutinizing the distant apparition upon the prairie, with a look in which stern indignation seemed strangely commingled with sadness. In that speck of snowy whiteness which, to other eyes, might have appeared the harbinger of civilization, he saw only a cloud that—in his way of thinking—threatened to throw a blighting shadow over the future—not only of his profession, but his life!

"Dog-gone queer," he exclaimed, after a short while spent in scrutinizing the forms seen moving around the wagon. "Dod-rotted queer, ef them's all thar is o' them. Only two waggins, an' eight or ten men about 'em—most o' 'em niggers, fur ez I kin make out. Some small planter, w' his belongin's, I reckon. An' ef thet's all thet's comin' out to settle hyar, they'll stan' a poor chance w' Tiger Tail an' his ugly lot—thet is, ef the Injun should take a set ag'in them."

"Perhaps there are other wagons coming on behind," suggested Thornley.

"Ef thar be, they must be a good bit behind. We kin see the purrayrie fer ten mile, on the track they're on. Whar's the others? Ain't neery one—nor yet the sign o' a critter, on foot or a-hosback. No; them's we see thar, 'pears to be the hull gang. Guess we'd better git forward, an' find out who an' what they air, anyhow."

Saying this, he brought his heels, with a heavy, double kick, against the ribs of his mule, and set the animal in motion toward the spot where the wagons were stopped—his companion spurring up and riding alongside.

CHAPTER V.

AN OLD ACQUAINTANCE.

COLONEL MAGOFFIN and his party had all dismounted, and were preparing their encampment for the night, when they saw two horsemen approaching over the plain. The sight of strange men—either afoot or on horseback—is one always to be treated with suspicion upon

the prairies; and the colonel, following his usual custom of cautiousness—taught him by his military experiences in the early Indian wars—had directed those with him to have their weapons in readiness.

But, as the horsemen appeared to be making approach without any show of either stealth or distrust—moreover, as on coming nearer, it could be seen that their skins were white—all suspicion was dispelled; and the emigrants awaited their arrival on the ground only with feelings of curiosity. They had been traveling for days without having encountered a soul, and they had no expectation of meeting white men in that locality. Colonel Magoffin, twelve months before, had made an exploratory visit to the Cross Timbers; the result being his determination to settle there—which he was now carrying out. But he had heard of no other settlers having preceded him; and, therefore, the presence of white men in the place needed explanation.

As they came near, however, he guessed, from their dress and accouterments, who—or at least what—they were. Trappers or hunters their garb proclaimed them. He was not permitted to put the first question. The older of the two took the initiative by hailing in a loud voice, as he rode forward upon the ground:

"What air ye, anyhow?" was the blunt interrogatory of Wash Carrol, as he slung his diminutive carcass out of the saddle, and stood confronting him who seemed the leader of the party—Magoffin himself.

"A straight question," replied the colonel; "and to give a straight answer to it, I may tell you that we are settlers in search of a location."

"An' whar do ye purpiss lo-katin'?"

"We've half made up our minds to stop here—on this very spot."

"Air'th'ar no more o' y'ur party?"

"No more than what you see."

"An' no more a-goin' to jine ye?"

"No—not that I know of."

"Stranger! this chile don't want to 'pear impertinent; but he w'd ask ef ye hev kalkerlated the danger o' makin' a settlement hyur?"

"Danger? Of what?"

"Injuns, in coorse! I tell ye, mister, thar's a putty bad lot o' red-skins jest roun' about these hyur Cross Timmers."

"How is it you are not afraid of them—you and your comrade? You live here, do you not?"

"Me an' my kumrade—yes. Thar's rayther diff'unt. Me an' my kumrade don't need build a big house, that kin be see'd twenty mile across the paraira. Besides, me an' my kumrade hain't got much that a Injun 'ud think worth while to take away from us—only our skulps, an' them we've to look arter right sharp, I tell ye. Then, Injuns don't so much mind the like o' us thet air hunters. W'l' settlers they feel diff'rent—knowin' thet the settlements air death to the'r huntin'-groun's. Stranger, it air altogether diff'rent. We hain't nothin'—whar'as, you hev somethin' a paraira Injun 'ud be likely to covet, an' surtint to try to take away from ye, ef he do."

As the old hunter uttered these words, he glanced significantly toward the two girls, who at that moment, had just stepped from the Dearborn, and stood blushing—like two grand, beautiful flowers of different species, that, by the touch of an enchanter's wand, had just sprung into life, and fresh blooming upon the prairie.

Even the old hunter, who had so lately sworn himself against all womankind, could not help gazing upon them with admiration; while the glance of his younger comrade, after straying ultimately from one to the other, at length became riveted upon the Creole; and for some time remained so—as if he had lost the power to withdraw it.

There was no rudeness in the act, and none intended. It was only an involuntary yielding to the fascination of beauty; all the easier for the young horse-hunter, who, for a long period, had looked upon no female face of brighter hue than that of an Indian squaw.

As he at length desisted from his gaze, and turned unwillingly away, Edward Thornley felt in his secret heart that, from that hour, his heart's tranquillity—of which he had so lately boasted—was gone, in a second of time.

Colonel Magoffin understood the hunter's last words. He could not help understanding them—nor did they fall upon his ear without giving him a certain feeling of uneasiness. It was a thought that had not before occurred to him; for, while dwelling on the dangers to which he might be exposed in the remote wilderness of the Cross Timbers, he had based his calculations on the belief that it was not uncommon for parties of white men—as small, or even smaller than

his—to traverse this district of country, without fear of danger. He had himself done this but the year before, and met with no molestation from the Indians. True, these parties were all men; while that now with him, was very differently composed. The horse-hunter's speech had therefore caused him some apprehension; but, in order not to alarm those to whom the allusion referred, he affected not to comprehend it in its full sense, and simply said, in reply:

"I think, sir, there's not so much danger; and we'll be able to take care of what we've brought with us. We're not many in numbers—that is, the whites of our party; but my darkies are all trained to the handling of other weapons besides the hoe. There isn't one of the lot that can't make good use of a shooting-iron. I picked them out for that; and it'll take a strong force of red-skins to give us any trouble."

Something like a sneer passed over the face of the old prairie-man, while the expression upon that of his younger comrade seemed to say: that in case of attack from Indians, or any other enemies, the new settler could count at least one man, added to the number of his defenders.

"The Indians out here are reported to be in peace now," pursued the colonel, in an interrogative strain. "So it was understood, upon the Red river, when we left. I hope nothing has transpired to the contrary?"

"Oh, nothin', as this chile knows on," replied Carrol. "Only that ther pecee air like pie-crust—easy broke. It air 'bout as much to be depended on as a laryette o' cobwebs for the holdin' o' a bull-buffler. They'll break it, jest like the snappin' of a pipe-stem, whensomiver they see fit, and whensomiver thar's anythin' to tempt 'em."

Again the old hunter gave a significant look toward the young ladies; who, fortunately, otherwise occupied, did not observe it.

"Are there any Indians immediately about here?" asked Colonel Magoffin.

"Not jest immediyt. 'Bout twenty mile furrer down the Timmers, on the bank o' this hyar stream—which air one o' the heads of the Trinity—thar's a when. It's a small band o' the ole Floridy Seminoles, thet's strayed from the main tribe, arter comin' out hyar in the Resurvation. They go rovin' about unner a chief they call Tiger Tail—an' all o' a tiger air thet same young savage. They fut up 'bout a hundred an' fifty—men, weemen an' childer. The weemen an' childer ye mayn't see much o'; but the men air here an' thar' all the time, an' may come across ye at any minnit. So I guess ye'd better keep y'ur eyes skinned fer 'em, an' hev y'ur shootin'-irons along wi' ye—whursomiver ye go."

"We shall take care of that," replied the planter, in a tone of confidence, intended to reassure such of his following as had overheard the previous conversation.

"Whar mout ye hail from?" asked the old horse-hunter, becoming a little mollified in admiration of the cool courage displayed by the new-comer.

"Tennessee."

"What mout be y'ur name?"

"Magoffin. I am usually called Colonel Magoffin."

"Kurnel Magoffin! Ye ain't any kin to a Lootenant Magoffin, as served w'l' old Hickory in the Creek wars, an' ag'in the Britishers, at Noo Orleans?"

"I fancy I must be the same. I don't remember that there was any other officer of the name in General Jackson's army."

"Why!" exclaimed the mustanger, springing forward and grasping the planter by the hand, "kin you be thet Lootenant Magoffin! Yes, you air! I now remember ye. Don't ye recollect me? Ef ye don't, it shesn't be the ugly cut across my cheek as shed hinder ye. I got it while savin' y'ur own self from the tomahawk o' a big Cherokee Injun in the fight of the Horse-shoe Bend!"

"My God! Wash Carrol, is it you?" cried the colonel.

In another instant the old horse-hunter was off his feet, raised aloft in the arms of the stalwart Tennesseean, who for some moments held him in fraternal embrace.

All upon the ground—black as well as white—gathered around to witness this scene of unexpected recognition; while the two young ladies, imitating the affection of the colonel, lavished kind words on the strange individual, whose not very prepossessing looks had hitherto held them aloof.

As Edward Thornley stood looking on, he would have given all his share of the captured mustangs for one of those sweet glances cast up-

on his comrade by the young Creole girl—whose name he now learned to be Louisiana Dupre.

He felt—as did Colonel Magoffin—that if any danger was to be apprehended from the Indians, the new-come colonist would have another arm besides his own, and another rifle upon which they might rely.

As soon as the excitement caused by this unexpected recognition had, to some extent, subsided, Wash Carrol—now deeply interested in the welfare of his old friend—commenced, more gravely, to counsel him.

"He's a mighty bad sort o' a Injun, is Tiger Tail," said he; "an' a bad lot thet's wi' him—wuss even than the Kimanch themselves, w'l' whom he's in a kind o' league. His band's composed o' a when o' young fellurs thet war too wicked to keep the kumpany o' thar own tribe, on the Resurvation. Never mind; since you're out hyur fur settlin', you must make the best o' it; an' I'd recommend ye to begin by fust buildin' a block-house. Arter thet, ye kin set up y'ur shanty, an' the other fixin's. I reckun, colonel, you know how to put a block-house together?"

"I should know," answered the Tennesseean. "There's one still standing by the old home—stead I have left. I know the pattern well."

"All right! Me an' Ed Thornley'll come over, an' gi'e ye a heist wi' it. We're out hyur hoss-huntin', an' hev jest druv a fresh cavayard inter the trap. Soon's we've seed them secure, ye may expect us. Thar's another fellur along wi' us—though he ain't much account. 'Bout the site o' a block-house, thar's a bit o' groun' ye can't eezly beat—just thar, clost by the bank o' the crik, whar thet grove o' timmer stands. Them trees'll gi'e you logs enuf, 'thout any toatin'; an' a well sunk inside won't need go any deeper than the water in the crik. Besides, as ye see, the bank's steep jest thar. It'll purtect ye on one side; an' ye kin set up a stockade, torst the paraira."

"I shall do just as you say, Carrol."

"Wal, kurnel, take my advice furrer, an' don't delay 'bout it. Git y'ur axes inter them trees, fust thing ye think o'."

"By daybreak to-morrow morning."

"All right," said Wash; and after a few more words, to explain the nature of his own movements, he and his comrade remounted their mules, and turned back in the direction of their own domicile.

CHAPTER VI.

AN ASSASSIN IN SOLILOQUY.

"CURSE them for a couple of laggards! I wonder what can be keeping them! They've been gone long enough to have been to the settlements. I suppose they've filled their own bellies, and don't care how I'm hungering here. Ach!"

"They'll be off for Nacogdoches, as soon as their lot's tamed. I don't go with them—I daren't. No. There are people from Louisiana—settlers—coming in every day. I'd be sure of meeting some old face—some sharp eye to recognize me; and then—those accursed Regulators! What am I to do? Stay here all my life—an outcast upon the prairies? To think I am forever separated from her—she for whom—"

He stopped abruptly, and looked apprehensively round, as if he feared some one might hear him. After a short silence, however, he burst out with an expression of intense longing: "Oh! could I only have her in my arms for a single hour, I would risk all—even the rope."

"Can I not go back to Louisiana, and live there in disguise? Why not? My beard would do something toward it. But no. It needs money to keep out of every one's sight—and money I haven't got. Never will have it by such a paltry trade as this—catching horses at ten dollars a head."

"Stay; there's a better scheme. Fanning has told me of it. He intends joining the Comanches for a raid over the Rio Grande that gets plunder, and might yield riches. It is said that some of these Mexican *haciendas* have large sums of specie in their houses—gold and silver plate. I've more than half a mind to join Fanning and his freebooting band. It only needs to change the color of my skin—not much, at that."

"By heavens! I'll do it. Once in possession of money, I can go anywhere, and do anything. That is the true giver of disguises, and the means to act under them. This fellow—Thornley—has some cash. He'll buy my share of the captured mustangs; and then let them take them to a market. I'll stay with Fanning, and with him go over the Rio Grande."

These were the thoughts of Louis Lebar—or the man who so called himself—as he sat by the wild horse corral, awaiting the return of his fellow mustangers.

Not long after, though much later than he expected, they made their appearance.

"You did well to come at last," he said, gruffly. "What, in the name of thunder, detained you?"

"Oh! If you'd been with us, you'd have seen something would have detained you, too," replied Thornley, good-naturedly. "A pair of pretty girls is a sight one don't see every day, out here by the Cross Timbers."

"There are some pretty girls in the Seminole tribe. You haven't come across them, have you?"

Lebar said this with a sneer: as much as, that he himself was the favored party in that quarter.

"I'm not speaking of squaws, Master Louis," retorted the mustanger; "but girls with a white skin, young ladies—angels, Carrol, here, would call them. Wouldn't you, Wash?"

"Durned ef I w'dn't; an' durned ef I don't. Ef they ain't angels—both on 'em—this chile never sot eyes on an angel."

"Ed Thornley, you and Wash Carrol have made up your minds to have a joke on me. I'm not in much humor for it, till I've had something to eat. After that, I may be better pleased to listen to your chaffing."

"Eat, then!" said Wash, handing the Louisianian a wallet containing some corn-cake and cold roast turkey. "But thar ain't no chaffin' 'bout it. It air a true story—jest as Ed says it."

"On honor, it's true, Lebar. We have seen what we say."

"When, pray?" demanded the hungry hunter, commencing an attack upon the provisions; which seemed to put him in a better humor. "I'm ready to hear your explanation."

Thornley gave it, by detailing the encounter on the prairie with the party of newly-arrived settlers.

"Where are they from?" asked the Louisianian, after listening to the first few particulars.

"Well," said Thornley, "although they're all one family, they are from two different States. Some of them are from Tennessee—and some from Louisiana. By the way, Lebar, as you are a Louisianian, you may know something about them?"

Lebar did not need this question to excite his curiosity. It was already excited, by hearing the word "Louisiana." For him that name had a terrible significance.

"Louisiana's a large State," he said, preserving an air of indifference; "and there are thousands of people in it I know nothing about. If you can tell me the name of these people, who have seen fit to leave it, perhaps I could then say whether they have ever been among my acquaintances. You heard their name, I suppose?"

"Well, that we didn't—at least I didn't—not the party from Louisiana. The gentleman at the head of the party gave us his name; but he is a Tennessean, and an old friend of Wash here, who can tell you all about him."

Lebar looked, inquiringly, toward Carrol.

"Oh, yes," drawled out Wash Carrol; "this chile air not only acquaint w' his name, but a good deal o' his history; an' can satisfy thet both air a honor to Tennessee. I fit alongside o' him, an' alongside o' ole Hickory, in the Crik an' Cherokee war; an' in them thar skrimmages thar wa'n't neery one thet stud better up to the scrutch than Lottenant Bill Magoffin—now Colonel Magoffin, o' Tennessee milisha."

It was fortunate for Louis Lebar that the sun had by this time set, and the shades of night were around them. It hindered his two companions from observing the deadly pallor that overspread his face when the name of "Magoffin" fell upon his ear. And yet, Wash Carrol noted a trembling in his voice, and the assumption of indifference in its tone, when he asked, more mechanically than otherwise:

"Colonel Magoffin, is it?"

"Yes, siree," replied Wash; "that is the person."

The conversation dropped. The three men, wearied with their long horse-chase, and the working it had entailed, by common consent wrapped themselves up in their blankets, and lay down under the shadow of the trees, to seek sleep.

To all appearance, they were not long in finding it—despite the neighing of the captured steeds, and the barking of the prairie wolves, who prowled around the corral.

CHAPTER VII.

A STEALTHY RECONNOISSANCE.

Of the three mustangers, two of them were

asleep, almost on the instant of lying down. They were Carrol and Thornley. Sleep came suddenly, after the long spell of wakefulness, rendered necessary during the drive of the mustang herd.

Just then there was no repose for Louis Lebar. He had taken a nap, during the absence of the others, which had, to some extent, refreshed him. It was not this that kept him awake, but a wild tumult in his soul, caused by what his companions had communicated to him. He had not questioned them very minutely about the personnel of the emigrant party. He was afraid of doing so lest he might arouse some suspicions.

Although night had come on during the conversation, and they could not note the changed expression of his face, his voice had trembled and he knew it. It had done so from the moment of his hearing the name "Magoffin."

He had laid himself down at some distance from the other two. He did not keep his recumbent attitude for long—only long enough to assure himself that both were buried in sleep, which he could tell had taken place by their sonorous snoring.

Then he rose silently erect, permitted the blanket to slip down at his feet, and, stepping forth from its folds, strode off, crouching, through the trees.

On getting to the outer edge of the grove he stopped for a second or two to reflect—or rather to guide himself as to the direction he should take.

It was the camp of the colonists he intended visiting. He knew the locality in which it had been pitched. In a few words Carrol had described the place. It was not over two miles off; and there was, therefore, no need for him to take his mule. He could walk with ease the distance afoot—moreover, the animal might betray him, for the visit was to be one of stealth.

In a short while he had taken the bearings of the ground, and into the starlight he started across the prairie.

"Magoffin!" he muttered to himself, as he strode on. "They had an uncle of that name, somewhere in Tennessee. It must be they! An uncle from Tennessee, a young lady, his niece, from Louisiana, and the other girl, her cousin. I've heard she had such a cousin. The coincidence would be too strange. It must be they. It can not be otherwise."

"Is it the hand of God—or the devil? If it be Louisiana Dupre, one or the other is on my side. If it be she, one or the other has delivered her to me at last. By heavens, it seems too strange for belief!"

He strode on till a light sparkled before his eyes. He knew it was the camp-fire of the emigrants, kindled among the trees. There was a "spinet" of timber along the bank of the stream, and, entering under this, he proceeded on in silence.

He soon came in sight of the encampment. He saw the white canvas tilts of the wagons, showing gray under the starlight, with the animals standing around them. The fire was a little apart, and blazing brightly. Its flame fell upon a circle of faces.

Men and women—all whites.

Another fire was near, encircled by black faces and burly forms. They were the negro slaves. It was still early, and they were occupied in the cooking of their suppers, the planter and his family having finished theirs.

Lebar dropped upon his hands and knees, and crawled nearer. The trunks of the trees and the shadow of their foliage overhead gave him security from being seen. It was only necessary for him to avoid making noise; and this precaution he successfully observed. Gliding silently on, he at length drew near the fire, sufficiently near to enable him to distinguish the faces.

Among the rest, he saw one that sent the blood in wild current through his veins—that of the woman he had long loved, and to whom he had hopelessly sued!

Lebar cowered behind the tree-trunk, looking upon that pale, beautiful face.

It seemed almost a fate—one of those dark destinies that *must* be fulfilled—and as the spy stole away through the trees, and back to the sleeping-place of the mustangers, his whole thoughts were altogether occupied in contriving the means by which it could be shaped to his own end.

That night nothing could be done; and he lay down again on the spot from which he had risen—neither of his companions having suspected his absence.

Even his wicked spirit could no longer resist weariness, and he soon fell asleep, despite the shrill, wild neighing of the mustangs—wilder at

finding themselves restrained from the free range of their prairie pastures.

CHAPTER VIII.

A VILE BARGAIN.

"WHAT brings the Black Mustanger to the Seminole camp at this late hour of the night?"

"He comes to do the Seminole chief a service."

"He is welcome at all times—more so when he brings with him a favor—what is it?"

"Tiger Tail wants a squaw!"

"He has many."

"Not any that are white."

"No; they are all of his own race and color."

"Tiger Tail has told me of his desire to possess a white wife."

"He will give a hundred horses for such a one—that is, if she be young and beautiful."

"He may have one that is both, and without giving a single horse for her."

"The Black Mustanger's words are pleasant to the ear. When and where can this treasure be obtained?"

"Almost at any time—and not far off."

"But there are conditions. There is danger to be encountered?"

"There are conditions, but not much danger."

"Will the mustanger explain himself?"

"He will."

The chief, who was already smoking, took the pipe from his mouth, handed it to his visitor, and then filling another for himself, assumed an attitude to listen.

The mustanger continued:

"This day there has arrived out here a party of whites, bringing with them about an equal number of negroes. They are emigrants from the States, who intend making a settlement not far from this place. I have not seen them myself, but my comrades have, and told me of the spot where they've made their camp, and intend building a house. What's more, from the description, I know who they are. Now, chief, you have promised me your friendship—you have sworn it."

"Tiger Tail will keep his oath," grunted the Indian, taking the calumet from his mouth, and making a cabalistic sign with its long feather-adorned stem.

"I know it," continued the mustanger; "and will trust to you—for you, also, will have a reward in that which must be done. What I want is this: that you, with your band, attack this party of emigrants; kill every white man of them—about the blacks it don't matter—and carry off the two white women as captives."

"There are two?"

"Yes; both young girls—both beautiful; one of them to be the wife of the Seminole chief."

"And the other?"

"My wife—or what you may please to call it. 'Tis for that I seek your aid."

"The Black Mustanger has seen this pale-faced girl before?"

"I have seen her, and loved her. She has been the curse of my life. For her sake I have committed crime; I love her still, and will commit other crimes to possess her. You, chief, will assist me?"

"She must be very beautiful."

"She is!"

"The more beautiful of the two?"

"Not in your eyes, chief. I know that you have told me you wanted a white squaw—one with the red on her cheek, and the golden sunlight in her hair. She has not that; but her cousin has—for the two are cousins. I shall have no fear of being jealous, for I know which of the two will attract Tiger Tail."

"The Black Mustanger speaks fair. If it be as he says, there need be no jealousy between us. It shall be as he wishes it. What action will he counsel?"

"Go with your band to the encampment of the whites. There see for yourself, and make your plans as they appear best. First speak to them fairly; there is no need for haste, as they've come here to form a settlement. I must not be with you—nor must either of my comrades suspect anything of our design. They know nothing of my past life, or that I ever met these people before. If they knew that—and something besides—I should be shy about going back to them. We have just trapped a drove of wild horses, and to-morrow intend taming them. At that, I shall go on with them all the same, and, when it's over, return to this place, and hear what the Seminole chief thinks of this scheme which I have proposed to him. Tiger Tail will then tell me what he thinks of

her with the roses on her cheek, and the sunlight in her hair. When he has once seen her, I know he will want her, as much as I do the paler lily by her side. Chief! are you agreed?"

Another grunting exclamation—with another cabalistic movement of the plumed pipe-stem—told how consonant was the infamous proposal to the feelings of the savage.

His visitor did not spend much more time in the tent; only a few minutes, given to further explanations. Then, remounting his mule, he rode back to the corral, where his companions were still sleeping.

CHAPTER IX. THE HORSE-TAMERS.

THE sun leaped up with a bound, as it seemed, from the prairie to the east of the Cross Timbers, as Thornley and Wash Carrol woke up. Lebar was still sleeping, as the old hunter sat up and threw off his blanket with a loud yawn. The sound awakened the Creole, who started up on his elbow, with a wild, suspicious glance around, as if he was in fear of some one. Wash Carrol remarked it, and bluntly observed:

"What in thunder ails ye, Lebar? Ye look as skeered as ef ye'd seen a spook."

The Creole's glance fell beneath the hunter's eye, and he answered, with some confusion:

"Oh! nothing, nothing. Had a bad dream, and your noise startled me; that's all."

He rose from the ground as he spoke, and shook himself. Thornley was already up, and looking over the bars of the corral toward the captured herd of mustangs. The animals had recovered their strength and pride during the day's rest and food that had been accorded them. Wash Carrol had taken good care to pitch the corral where the richest grass abounded and where water was plentiful. It occupied the whole bottom of a little valley, surrounded with swells and mottes of timber, the swells crowned with the zigzag lines of the strong snake fence.

"Well, Wash, remarked the young Virginian: 'the horses look well this morning. We shall have a job to tame them.'"

"Never you fear, younker," said the hunter, grinning; this chile never seen the hoss as wouldn't cum down to the choke of a good larryet. Cum, fellers, let's get our grub, and go to work. Tain't too much time as we've got ef we've to help the kurnel put up his—"

He stopped suddenly, as he caught the coal-black eyes of Lebar fixed upon him.

"What! are you going to help him settle?" demanded the Creole, suspiciously. "Seems to me that we'll have enough to do to get our horses in hand to drive to the settlements, without helping other folks build shanties. They've got niggers enough to do all their work—haven't they?"

"Wal, yes," returned Carrol, indifferently; "but then, ye see, out in Tennessee, we allers helps our friends, and so me and Ed here hev kinder made up our minds to give him a lift. Who knows? Mebbe we won't want his help if the Kumanch gits ugly, or Tiger Tail war to kick up a muss."

While the old hunter was talking, he was also eating a huge "hunk" of corn-bread and cold turkey. Ed Thornley had followed his example without any talking. The young man was too much occupied in thinking. The sweet face of Louisiana Dupre had been floating before his eyes all the night long in dreams, and it was the first thing in his thoughts that morning. So the breakfast proceeded in silence, for Lebar looked sulky, as usual, and Wash kept a keen eye on his face from some ill-defined suspicion that all was not right in that quarter.

"I say, Wash," said Thornley, some time after, in a hesitating, nervous kind of manner, unusual with him; "don't you think that spotted mare would make a pretty lady's horse?"

They were standing by the rails of the corral as he spoke, Wash slowly gathering up the coils of a long rawhide rope in his hand, while he puffed at a short pipe. Lebar was some distance off, collecting his implements of all kinds.

The old hunter turned round with a queer smile on his scarred face, and surveyed Thornley quizzically. The young man felt himself color, and tried to look indignant.

"So yer thar, are ye?" said Wash, with a sniff; "durned of them wimmin ain't the devil and all. Dod rot my skin! I don't blame ye, lad. That ar light-haired one she air jest for all the world like an angel as I see'd painted in the church at El Paso wunst on a time. Yes, lad, that air spotty would make a thunderin' pretty hoss fur a gal to ride."

He ended with this unqualified assurance, and put his foot on one of the rails to climb over

into the corral as he spoke. Thornley laid his hand on his arm. He spoke quickly, in a low voice, as Lebar came toward them.

"I say, Wash, pick out another horse, like a good fellow, and let's make each of the young ladies a present of one. I noticed they had none. I'll make it all right with you."

Wash nodded assent, but said nothing, for at that moment Lebar came up. Then the three mustangers climbed over into the corral, and commenced their task of taming.

Their equipments were of the simplest nature. Each man carried in his hand a long lasso of plaited rawhide, well greased, and exceedingly supple. All were equipped with Spanish spurs of portentous size, and three Mexican saddles lay on the ground, outside the gate of the corral. We say "gate," but it was nothing more than a panel of the fence, of which the bars took in and out.

Wash Carrol, as the most experienced hunter, took the lead.

"Here, Lebar," he said, "you ain't much with a larryet, you know. You'd better tend gate, I guess, till we git a kuppel on 'em outside."

Lebar threw down his lasso indifferently. "All right," he said, half-sulkily; "anything to get through. It's less trouble, anyway."

When the two hunters advanced into the corral the scene was very interesting. The captured mustangs, which had been feeding about in the corral, every now and then smelling inquisitively at the fence, now, seeing the hunters approach, galloped off to the other side in great consternation. When they could get no further, they crowded up into a corner, backing up against the fence in deadly terror. Only the strength of the angles, reinforced as they were by strong posts, driven deep into the earth, enabled the barrier to withstand the pressure.

Wash Carrol walked leisurely toward the horses, parting the coils of the lariat in his hands. The noose, about six feet in diameter, trailed on the ground from his right hand, which held about half of the coiled rope.

The rest was in his left hand, the end being fastened to his waist.

"Now then, Ed," he said, his eye roving keenly over the various-colored herd; "you kin take spotty, ef you like. That ar buck-skin's the hoss for my money."

They were within twenty feet of the crowded herd as he spoke; and, at the same instant, he threw back his right shoulder and then gave a forward swing of his whole body. The noose of the lariat flew through the air as it left his hand, the coils waving snake-like over the frightened, plunging mustangs. The next moment the circle of rawhide reached its destination, hovered a moment, and then descended with unerring aim over the neck of a beautiful cream-colored mare, with black mane and muzzle, known in Texas as a "buck-skin."

Almost simultaneously, Thornley cast his own lasso with equal success, inclosing in its noose the white mare covered with black spots that had excited his admiration in the first instance.

Then commenced the task of bringing out the captives, at first sight apparently an impossibility, so closely were they wedged in with the rest. But the skill of the mustangers soon effected this. Their prizes, feeling the lasso and wild with terror, plunged desperately away to escape. Hardly exerting any strength the mustangers hung back on the lassoes, thus converting the flight of the mares into a circular motion. They wanted them to go to the gate, and they exerted what strain they did in an exactly opposite direction. Thus, thinking they were escaping, both mares plunged out of the crowd, galloping round in wide circles, and growing weaker and weaker under the strangling noose.

Once clear of the herd, by the same skillful management, they were got through the gate, outside the bars, their captors hanging back at a great angle and allowing themselves to be slowly dragged on by the choking steeds.

Once outside, they brought them to a halt, almost suffocated, and slowly began to pull up to them, hand over hand, through the now opened gate. As they passed through, the spotted mare trembled violently, and fell to the earth completely exhausted.

CHAPTER X. TIGER TAIL'S WOOING.

THE sound of axes, quickly plied, waked the echoes by the banks of the stream that ran by the Cross Timbers, as Colonel Magoffin and his little party went sturdily to work, to fell timber for their block-house. All the men of the party were fully employed, except Eugene Dupre, and even he, although not hard at work by any

means, was pleasantly occupied, as he thought, in cleaning his double-barreled shot-gun, and talking nonsense to his fair cousin, Tennessee.

The young lady herself appeared not displeased at his presence, although she thought it necessary to protest, laughingly, against his waste of time.

"You'll rub the inside out of that gun, Eugene," she said. "You've polished at it ever since breakfast, and if we are to have turkey for dinner, it's high time you were off, sir. Louie, can't you persuade this troublesome brother of yours to leave us in peace? I want to go flower-hunting."

Eugene looked at his gun with great solicitude, but he could not detect a speck upon it. He rose with an air of resignation, saying:

"I wouldn't drive you off in that way, Tennie, if you bothered me ever so much. But you girls are all hard-hearted. You don't care how a fellow feels, not if he's pining away."

A light smile crossed the pale face of Louisiana Dupre!

"Don't talk nonsense, Genie," she said. "You have nothing to pine for. Go, like a dear, good boy, to please me."

She ended with a sort of half-sigh, and Eugene's glance became soft and tender at once. He stroked his sister's dark locks quietly, and answered:

"I'll go, sis. Good-by. Don't fret; there's a dear, good sister. Good-by, Tennie. If I don't bring you a fat turkey for dinner, you may call me a bungler."

And he kissed his hand and turned away on his path to the river, whistling merrily as he went.

Louisiana looked after him sadly.

"Poor Genie!" she said. "He is so good and kind to me, and he's all I have in the world now since mamma died, and since poor Oscar—"

Tennie threw her arms around her cousin's neck with impulsive affection.

"Don't talk of it, Louie," she murmured, fondly. "Poor fellow! he is happy in heaven now. Try to forget all those gloomy thoughts, which make you so miserable. He is far better off than we are, Louie. Remember that."

"I know it," said the girl, with a faint smile. "I always try to think of it that way. If I did not know how good he was, I should feel much worse. But oh! Tennie, I can't help sometimes thinking also of that black, horrible pool, and—"

The girl shuddered violently as the thought crossed her mind. Tennessee hugged her closely, and whispered:

"Try to forget it, Louie. Try to forget it. Let's go and gather flowers, and talk of some thing else."

Louie kissed her cousin gratefully, and wiped away a tear that had nearly fallen.

"You're a darling girl, Tennie," she said. "And I am foolish. I know it's wrong to pine so, but I'll try to do better. Come, let us go."

And she rose as she spoke, and passed her arm around Tennie's waist, to stroll off.

The two girls were in the midst of the camp at the time.

The colored women were clearing away the remnants of the breakfast, and the children were licking the plates. They could see the open meadows before them, and the forms of the colonel and Strother, superintending the hauling of logs down by the motte by the river-side.

Suddenly Tennessee started back, as they neared the edge of the camp, and uttered a faint cry of alarm. She clung close to her cousin, and both girls halted and gazed, spell-bound.

Within ten feet of them, and seeming as if he had risen from the earth, stood a gayly-clad Indian chief, holding in his hand a long calumet or pipe, the stem adorned with feathers. The Indian stood there, with his glowing eyes, burning like live coals, fixed upon the blue orbs of Tennessee Magoffin, with an expression of admiration and longing that alarmed the girl, she knew not why.

How he had come there was a mystery easily solved. The wagons had been drawn up close to a large motte, and he must have come through under shelter of the trees. But, to the two girls, his sudden appearance was appalling, and his looks increased their apprehension.

Not that he was ugly. On the contrary, he was remarkably handsome for an Indian—tall, lithe, graceful as Apollo, with magnificent eyes and long hair. His dress was in the extreme of Indian dandyism, and instead of the usual buffalo robe, he wore a mantle composed of the skins of jaguars, fringed with the tails of the same animals, from which he derived his name.

Tiger Tail—for it was he—enjoyed the sensation he had produced. The vanity of the vagabond Indian was tickled by the terror of his beholders. Tennessee was deadly pale, and her cousin, strange to say, showed far the most courage. She had seen more Indians in Louisiana than her cousin in Tennessee, where they were almost extinct.

"Don't seem to be frightened," she whispered. "He won't dare touch us while the men are in full sight. I will speak to him."

She accordingly addressed Tiger Tail in as firm a voice as she could command.

"Good-morning, chief," she said. "What will you have? We are always glad to see good Indians."

Tiger Tail slowly and lingeringly withdrew his eyes from the face of Tennessee, and looked at Louie. He waved his hand with great dignity, and answered, in broken English:

"Want whisky—ugh!"

"You can not have it," answered the girl, decidedly. "We have none, in the first place; and it is wicked to give it to Indians. It makes them mad."

Tiger Tail waved the pipe in his hand.

"Want see white chief," he said. "He give whisky. Tiger Tail great chief. Ugh!"

"The white chief is yonder, by the river," said Louie, quietly. "He has many guns with him. He loves good Indians, but he kills the bad ones. He will not give you any whisky."

Tiger Tail looked at her with a glance that sent the red blood flooding all over her face and neck, and made her tremble.

Then he treated Tennie to a similar stare of unequivocal admiration and desire, till she lowered her eyes in very shame, and whispered:

"Louie! Louie! Let's scream and run! He frightens me to death. Perhaps he wants to kill us!"

The chief heard the remark, and smiled reassuringly, something as a wolf might. Handsome as he was, and not much over twenty years old, there was a hardened, leering, insolent expression in his face hard to exaggerate.

"No kill pretty squaw," he said. "Tiger Tail come on peace. See. Hab no knife. Only pipe. All right."

And he lifted up his tiger-skin robe and displayed the belt of his hunting-shirt, innocent of weapons to all appearance, and only containing a small pouch of tobacco, ornamented with beads.

"Tiger Tail great chief," he pursued, proudly. "Come see white chief, say welcome."

"I'm sure we're very much obliged to you, Mr. Tiger Tail," said Tennie Magoffin, speaking for the first time, and trying in vain to hide the tremor of her voice. "Won't you go down to the river, and see my father? He knows how to talk to gentlemen of your kind better than we do."

Tiger Tail gave another interesting leer at Tennie, and made a step nearer, immensely flattered at her evident terror.

"Tiger Tail love talk pretty white squaw," he said. "Hab many squaw home. None like white squaw."

Tennessee trembled and faltered again. She longed ineffably for some one to come near her, but the men on the river-bank were too busy to notice anything, and she felt sick with fear under the Indian's evil glance.

Louie answered for her this time.

"Among our people," she said, bravely, "girls do not talk to strangers. If you want anything to eat, we will give it to you. If not, go down to the river-bank. The colonel will talk to you there."

"No want nothing to eat," said Tiger Tail, scornfully. "Got more than want to eat. Want gun, want powder, want blanket."

"Oh! Mr. Tiger Tail," said Tennessee, desperately; "they have ever so many guns down at the river-bank there. Go down and ask them, please. We haven't a single gun here. Indeed we haven't. Please, like a dear good Mr. Tiger Tail, do go down there. It's ever so much nicer than here."

Tiger Tail drew himself up with pride.

"Me go when me choose," he said. "Me want whisky."

And he stalked past them into the camp, where the negro women and children scattered before him, and stood looking on in panic and silence.

"Oh, Louie, what shall we do?" said Tennie, wringing her hands. "I daren't go for fear he steals something; and he may have a number of his comrades hidden in the wood."

Louie, whose presence of mind never forsook her, called to a small negro boy who was standing near, and told him to run down to the river

bank and tell the colonel that an Indian was in the camp.

Tiger Tail saw all, with his keen, roving eye, and the boy had not gone ten paces when the chief arose. He suddenly pulled from under his cloak a long lasso, which, as quick as a flash, he cast after the boy, the noose jerking him over on his back in a twinkling.

Then the chief shook his finger at the girls in a manner full of menace.

"No try dat again," said Tiger Tail. "Me know when me want to see white chief."

Tennessee turned paler than ever, and looked ready to faint.

Louie, also, for the first time, began to be seriously alarmed.

The chief's action looked as if he meant mischief, and what might have happened is uncertain, when the quick gallop of horses round the edge of the motte announced that strangers were approaching.

Tiger Tail's demeanor altered in a moment. He jerked the frightened boy to his feet, and loosened the lasso with a laugh, saying:

"Ho! ho! frighten pickaninny! No mean harm."

The next moment Wash Carrol and Thornley, each mounted on a handsome mustang, and leading another, came galloping up to the spot, full speed.

"I think so," ejaculated the hunter, looking at the Indian, with no favorable glance. "I think as how I knowed that hoss o' yours, that you left standin' by the t'other side this hyar motte. What d'yer want hyar, say?"

Tiger Tail had assumed an expression of angelic innocence. He exhibited his pipe.

"Come smoke peace with white chief," he said, gravely.

"Then why don't yer git down thar?" asked Wash. "The kurnel ain't hyar—he's thar. You hain't no call to stick your ugly mug in hyar, talkin' to young ladies—you hain't. You git! That's what you do."

Tennessee, frightened to death as she had been, was still constrained to smile, as she viewed the change in Tiger Tail's demeanor. The lately insolent look was gone, and the chief moved off toward the river in a manner that strangely suggested slinking, holding his pipe before him, as a badge, to show his peaceful intention.

As soon as he was gone, Tennie Magoffin burst out into a profusion of thanks to the old hunter, and the two mustangers dismounted from their beasts.

CHAPTER XI. THE TWO COUSINS.

"Oh, Mr. Carrol!" said impulsive Tennie; "how thankful I am that you came in time. Who knows what that wretch might have done before father could have got down to help us? Do you think he'll come again? His looks froze my very blood."

"Oh, no," said Wash, stoutly. "We'll take care o' him now. Them Injuns is always durned brave when there's nout but wimmin critters around. Yer seen how he wilted when we cum up. 'Tar' curious to me why his band ain't round hyar. Ef they had 'a' b'en, ye mout 'a' had a wusser skeer. Thar goes the varmint now, a-talkin' to the kurnel. Wag! how I do despise his hull tribe!"

"Hain't one of us better ride down there and warn the colonel how to treat him?" asked Ed Thornley, at this moment.

"Yer right, Ed. I'll go. Take keer o' the young ladies while I'm gone," said Wash, hurriedly. "Twon't do to rile him too much."

And he threw the lariat of the beautiful "buck-skin" mare to Thornley, and galloped off down toward the river-side, where Tiger Tail was calmly approaching the colonel's party, all of whom had stopped work, and were eying the Indian with considerable distrust.

"Do you think there's any danger, sir?" inquired Tennie of Thornley, as soon as Wash had gone.

"Not at present, Miss Magoffin," he answered, only too glad of the opportunity to talk to these charming girls, but wishing it had been the dark one who had spoken. "While the chief saw only you two ladies, whom he did not fear, I make no doubt he was insolent; but an Indian respects strength, and he would not dare to attack you openly, in broad daylight, while all your men are well armed."

Tennie heaved a sigh of relief. Thornley did not tell her what he apprehended—that Tiger Tail might return by night, and try to obtain that by surprise which he might fail in by force. He turned the conversation by asking:

"And how do you like Texas, Miss Magoffin?"

"If you had asked me an hour ago, I should have said splendid, sir; but since that horrid Indian came, the charm seems to have departed. How shall we ever be safe from him, Mr.—?"

"Thornley," said our hero, bowing; "Edward Thornley. Oh, well, your father is now building a block-house, and when that is finished, and provided with a good stockade, you need not fear all the Indians on the plains."

"But how long will it be before that?" asked Miss Dupre, speaking for the first time.

"The block-house ought to be defensible in two days," said Thornley, glad to address the object of his wishes. "Your father will probably move camp there to-night. This is no place for one. There is too much cover all round to conceal an enemy. Out yonder no one can get near without being seen. Still, I anticipate no danger, for you seem to be strong-handed."

Tennie Magoffin's cheerful disposition made this sober conversation irksome to her. She changed it by remarking:

"Mr. Thornley, what lovely horses you have there. So much prettier than those ugly mules you had yesterday. That cream-colored mare is a perfect beauty. I wonder if she would let me pat her?"

"Not quite yet, Miss Magoffin," said the mustanger, with a smile. "She was only tamed this morning, and needs a little more discipline yet. But I am glad you like her, for I believe my comrade intends her for you. The other is intended as a present for your cousin."

"And from whom, pray, Mr. Thornley?" demanded the girl, with a saucy twinkle of her blue eyes, which were quite sharp enough to see the state of the case.

Thornley colored deeply.

"From myself, if the young lady will accept it," he muttered, a strange bashfulness oppressing his usually open face. "We noticed that you had no horses, and Wash and I thought that possibly you would not think it a liberty—to offer you—won't you take them?"

Tennie's eyes sparkled with fun. A merry girl always enjoys the distress of a modest lover, especially if he is some other girl's lover. Louie Dupre raised her dark eyes to Thornley's simply and gravely.

"I thank you very much, Mr. Thornley," she said, quietly. "It was very kind of you to think of us. But I fear we shall be robbing you, to take such beautiful horses. They must have cost considerable money, which you cannot afford."

"No, I assure you," said Thornley, eagerly; "mustangs only fetch low prices now. Don't let that deter you. But they make beautiful ladies' horses. The spotted one will carry you like a bird. I'll give her one more lesson, and she will be ready for you to mount."

"Thank you," said Louie, simply, and there the matter ended, for, at that moment, Colonel Magoffin was seen approaching, at the head of his party of laborers, and accompanied by Tiger Tail. Wash Carrol rode alongside, and, when close by, dismounted and came up to Tennie Magoffin, with his best bow.

"Miss Tennie," said the old hunter, "me and my kumrad, we kinder think as how you and yer cousin hyar would like a kuppel o' critters to ride. So we jest larryteted them ar mustangs for yer, an' giv' 'em a breakin', so 's ye mout hev 'em ef yer wanted. Thar ar buck-skin's yourn, an' Spotty b'longs to Miss—Miss—yer cousin, thar."

"My name is Louisiana Dupre," said the young Creole, in her soft, somewhat melancholy voice; "and I thank you very much, Mr. Carrol."

"Oh! that ain't nothin'!" said Wash, indifferently; "we'll hev to give the critters another tamin' afore thur fit fur a lady to ride."

Here Colonel Magoffin came up with Tiger Tail, and passed them on his way to the camp. The Indian looked hopeful and expectant of something, with an expression of mild virtue on his face that would not have misbecome a hermit. Wash winked his eye comically, and put his tongue in his cheek, perfectly regardless of manners, as the chief passed. Tennie Magoffin smothered a laugh at the queer expression of his face, seamed as it was with the hideous scar. Tiger Tail heard the suppressed giggle, and turned but a single glance on Tennie. It was swift and instantly withdrawn, but the girl's face turned white at the malevolence of the look.

Wash waited till he had gone on, when he observed:

"Sneakin' cuss wanted whisky and powder. Curnel told him he wanted all his powder fur

bad Injuns, and never drank whisky. Goin' ter give him a plug of baccar and a red blanket."

"But won't he want more?" suggested Thornley. "This camp's in a bad place, if he comes round at night trying to steal."

"Goin' ter move arter dinner," said Wash, a little gruffly. "D'yer think I don't know ne-thin', Ed Thornley? Me and the curnel moves this artemoon, while you breaks the young ladies' horses. Hyar comes Tiger Tail."

As he spoke the chief reappeared from the side of the colonel's wagon, his face wreathed in smiles, carrying a bright scarlet blanket over his left arm, and holding in his right a huge black plug of navy tobacco. He passed by them, still smiling, and disappeared in the motte on the way to his horse. The colonel soon after came up and addressed Wash.

"I don't think that Indian is half as bad as he is painted, Wash. He seems to me to be a simple, good-natured soul. He looked tickled to death with his red blanket and his plug of tobacco."

"Pity yer didn't put a ounce of arse-nick in it, durn him," growled Wash. "You are too innocent for the paraira, curnel. D'ye think that cuss cum arter that blanket and a bit o' baccar? Not by a doggoned sight! He cum ter spy, that's what he did; and ef yer don't look sharp, he'll be a-comin' hyar this very night ter see what he kin get in the way of pickin'."

"Say you so?" said Magoffin. "Then the sooner we move camp to an open place the better, it seems to me."

"And that's what's the matter," quoth Wash, dryly.

CHAPTER XII. A TURKEY-HUNTER.

WHEN Eugene Dupre left the fire with his gun, he had made up his mind to bring home a couple of turkeys or a deer at the very least. The young man was an excellent shot, and had acquired some reputation among the bayous of his native State as a successful hunter. But he had never yet encountered a wild turkey in Texas, and was not aware of the extraordinary shyness of the bird. In Louisiana, when turkeys are met with, it is generally by surprise and at short range. In Texas it is necessary to decoy the old gobblers within gunshot by imitating the call of the female. Eugene had practiced this assiduously with the wing-bone of a turkey ingeniously manufactured for him by Mr. Strother, the overseer, who had been a mighty hunter in Tennessee, and whose second trip to Texas this was.

As the young Creole mounted his horse and rode down past the wood-cutters to the river-bank, old Strother cast a longing glance at him.

"Going after game, Eugene?" called out the colonel, who was superintending the hauling of logs to the block-house.

"Yes, sir," answered Eugene; "I saw a herd of deer over the river, through the glass this morning, and the turkeys are quite thick."

"I'm afraid you won't be able to get a turkey," said his uncle, smiling; "Strother tells me they're very shy round here."

"Indeed they are," said the overseer, earnestly. "Tain't every feller as can pick up a turkey round here, colonel. I'd better go with Mr. Eugene or ye won't hev much for dinner, I reckon."

"Well, Strother," said the colonel, good-humoredly, "I guess we can spare you for a few hours. Don't go far, though."

"All right, colonel," said the overseer, eagerly; "I'll show Mr. Eugene how to do it, and we'll be safer together, in case any o' them pesky Injuns comes loafin' round."

Eugene was only too glad of Strother's assistance, for the latter was celebrated for his luck. The overseer mounted his horse, and the two forded the river below, with the water almost up to the saddle-bow.

On the other side the prairie was thickly studded with mottes of timber, but to all appearance entirely deserted. The deer and turkeys that Eugene had seen in the morning had all fled out of sight, as the two crossed the stream. Strother rode up to the nearest motte and dismounted. The two led their horses in under the shelter of an enormous live-oak, whose heavy drapery of Spanish moss swept the ground on every side, completely hiding them from view. Strother secured his horse, and Eugene followed his example.

"Now, Mr. Eugene," said the Tennessean, "we'd better go through this hyar motte afoot, and keep still. Thar's turkeys about and not so fur off nuther, but ef they seen so much as the

end of a ha'r, we mout as well go hum, fur we won't see a feather o' theirs."

He carefully looked to the cap of his long squirrel-rifle, and started off through the motte, bent nearly double, and stepping with extreme caution. Eugene followed with equal silence, and the two stole through the thick wood, parting the underbrush with their hands to avoid rustle. The wind was in their faces. Strother would never have crossed the river where he did, had it not been for that circumstance. He would have made a circuit of several miles first.

At last they arrived so close to the other side that they could see an open stretch of prairie extending for over a mile before another motte was encountered.

But this prairie was as empty of game as the other, and Eugene uttered an exclamation of disappointment. Strother, however, settled himself down with perfect resignation on a fallen log, and signed to his companion to do the same. A thick screen of bushes fringed the edge of the motte in front of them, and they could command a full view of the prairie.

Eugene obeyed, though not without hesitation.

"What's the use of sitting here, Strother?" he asked; "we can't see anything."

"Sh!" said the Tennessean, lifting his finger.

"Hark to that!"

The two listened for some minutes without hearing anything, and Eugene was growing impatient, when suddenly the faint, far-off "Gobble, gobble, gobble!" of a turkey broke on their ears. Eugene drew out his turkey-call in a minute, and would have answered, but Strother restrained him.

"See hyar, Mr. Eugene," said the overseer; "ef I stay with yer, I must boss this job. Ef yer answer too quick y'll never git a gobbler hyar, in all creation. Let me do it, and I'll bring one up within twenty rods."

Eugene reluctantly consented to forego a trial of his skill. Strother produced his own call, and uttered a single "cluck!" plaintive and shrill, in exact imitation of the cry of the female turkey.

It was almost instantly answered from three different quarters, and at various distances.

Eugene was delighted. He wanted to answer at once.

"Don't ye do it," said Strother, earnestly; "half o' you young fellers loses turkeys through cluckin' too much. Them gobblers is e'na'-most the cutest critters as runs. They know the difference in a minute. It stands to reason. S'pose a gal has three fellers courtin' her. She don't holler to 'em, 'Come hyar an' kiss me,' She kinder draws back and keeps still. She knows well enough that the fellers'll come. All she's got to do is to keep still and let them git each other mad, like them fellers is a-doin' now."

As he spoke, he elevated his hand with a low laugh of satisfaction. All three of the old gobblers had begun again, and two of them were coming nearer, from the sound.

"Now some fellers," pursued Strother, tranquilly, "would go to cluckin' now. What 'ud be the consequence? Them gobblers 'ud stop and say 'That ain't no gal o' ourn,' and arter that you mout cluck till eternity. You wouldn't hyar another gobble, or see a feather."

"But if you don't answer any more, won't they think the hen-turkey's gone?" asked Eugene, who was growing interested.

"Wait till they're gittin' tired o' gobblin'," said the overseer; "then we'll liven 'em up a bit. You jest listen."

They sat silently there for at least ten minutes more. Every now and then one of the old turkey-cocks would gobble, and the challenge would be answered by his companions or rivals, but the sound only approached very slowly.

At last Strother raised the call to his lips, and uttered a second "cluck" during an interval of silence. It was much lower than the first, but the effect was magical. All three of the strange birds burst into a chorus of excited gobbles, and then there was dead silence.

"Now thur a-leggin' it," said Strother, in a low tone, with a grim smile. "Shouldn't wonder ef ye see one soon. Git yer shootin'-iron ready, with heavy shot."

And he laid his own long rifle over his knees, ready for an emergency. Eugene looked out eagerly over the prairie, his gun ready cocked, expecting every moment to see the turkeys coming. The gobblers sounded from three different mottes to the right and left, and after an interval of full five minutes, a second chorus arose much nearer.

"Answer them, Strother! answer them!" whispered Eugene, excitedly.

"Not by a doggoned sight," said the overseer,

philosophically. "T'would spile all now. You keep still. Hi! Thur he are!"

As he spoke, the figure of a majestic-looking wild turkey, standing quite four feet high, as he stood erect, came proudly tripping forth from the motte on the right, about a quarter of a mile off, running, with his wings extended, out into the open prairie. Here he halted abruptly, and craned his neck on high, looking all round him, as if intensely suspicious. Presently he uttered a loud and sonorous "GOBBLE-GOBBLE-GOBBLE-GOBBLE!"

It was instantly answered from the opposite motte, and forth came running two more turkeys, as different in vigor and grace from the tame turkey as can well be imagined. They moved proudly forward, and each stopped on seeing his rival, and began to strut and gobble desperately.

In their anger with each other, they had almost forgotten the cause of their hurry; and they strutted toward the center of the open space, evidently bent on a fight. Strother waited for at least ten minutes more, during which the strutting and fuming gallants had approached within a few yards of each other, but just out of gunshot from the concealed hunters.

"You fire arter me," he whispered to Eugene.

"We'll bag the hull caboodle then."

He raised the call to his lips, and gave forth the very faintest "cluck" imaginable.

But it was all-sufficient.

Down went every head, and, with extended wings, the three gobblers came tearing down full speed, racing to see who should be first to court the good graces of the concealed lady.

Strother lifted his rifle slowly.

Down came the turkeys within thirty paces, when they all halted.

Each inflated the scarlet wattles on throat and breast, and trailed his wings on the ground, while he spread his tail fan-like, and strutted round and round, gobbling loudly.

The Tennessean's rifle cracked, and the left-hand turkey rolled over on the sod, with a little round hole over his heart. Bang! bang! almost at the same minute, went the double-barrel of Eugene Dupre; and the heavy swan-shot knocked the life out of the two others in an instant.

The young Creole was delighted with his success. He thanked Strother warmly for the lesson he had given him, and weighed his prizes with great admiration. The least of them weighed nearly thirty pounds!

By this time it was high noon, and both the hunters began to feel the proverbial appetite of their kind.

"I promised Tennie a turkey," said Eugene, joyfully, "and here I've been better than my word. We have enough to feed the whole camp. But I thank you all the same, Strother, as I should never have got one, I do believe, if you hadn't been along. Let's go home."

"Ay, ay! I'm thinking they'll want me this artemoon," said Strother. "Ef they 'spects to git up that block-house by to-morrow night, we'll hev to be pretty spry, I guess. Wal, Mr. Eugene, you go round the motte to the right, and I'll go to the left. We mout start up a deer atween us, or mebbe a b'ar. I'll carry your turkeys."

The young man was not sorry to be relieved of the heavy load, and was eager to prove his skill if possible, so he and the Herculean overseer took opposite paths around the motte to return to their horses.

Strother trudged along under near a hundred pounds of meat with but little discomfort. His object in going that way was more to reconnoiter the country than in the hope of flushing game, and he was not disappointed in not seeing any. When he had got back close to the horses he was startled by hearing the quick double report of Eugene's gun, and muttered:

"Durn the boy! Whar did he git such luck?"

He quietly attached the turkeys to the rear of his saddle and awaited Eugene's reappearance. Time passed, and still he came not. Strother grew uneasy as the minutes went on. He shouted twice, but no answer came.

Hastily loosening the revolver in his belt and cocking his rifle, he ran round the motte to where he had heard the gun.

No Eugene was there!

On the prairie lay the discharged gun, and close to it the tracks of horses' feet, leading off to the nearest motte. The tracks were plain, but nothing else was in sight save a little pool of blood close to the empty gun.

Strother groaned aloud.

CHAPTER XIII.

OLD WASH SCENTS THE TRAIL.
COLONEL MAGOFFIN WAS STANDING UNDER A

tree, with Wash Carrol, eating a hasty lunch of bread and ham, and complacently surveying the progress of the block-house. Working with a will as they had been, fourteen pairs of hands had done a great deal of work in a small time. Already the heavy timbers, smoothed at top and bottom, and deeply notched at the corners of the structure, had risen in a firm, bullet-proof wall to a height of seven or eight feet, and the top timbers, with rows of auger-holes to serve as loop-holes, were nearly ready to put on.

The workmen were sitting round, eating their dinner, and cracking jokes, one with another, with all the careless gaiety of their race. The wagons had been hitched up and moved down close to the block-house, as suggested in the morning, and the women were busily engaged in transferring all the moveables into the inclosure, for protection. Since he had heard of Tiger Tail's strange demeanor in the morning, the colonel had determined not to let another night pass without having his precious treasures under shelter.

"We needn't put a roof on the house just yet, Wash," he said. "If we carry up the timbers a little higher, we can make a parapet to shelter behind, and put all our force to work on a stockade to protect the cattle."

"Guess we'll hev time, cunnel," said old Wash. "Injuns is plaguy cowardly critters, arter all, and it takes 'em a heap o' time ter make up thar mind to fight. Afore Tiger Tail's ready for us, mebbe we mout be ready for him, more'n he think of. But we hain't no time to lose. I don't like the way the pesky young varmint looked at the young ladies. Gosh! cunnel, your darter does clip it on that buck-skin mar! She rides e'ena most like a Comanche."

The exclamation was elicited by the sight of Tennessee Magoffin, already mounted on the pretty cream-colored mare Wash had tamed for her, and careering round and round the meadow, between them and the old camp, like a hawk on the wing. Tennie rode, like many another girl in the sunny South, as if she was born to the saddle. Her cousin could be seen, close by, preparing to mount the white mare, spotted with black, which Edward Thornley was holding for her. The pretty creature stood trembling under the sharp twitch of the *hakimo*, a peculiar noose around the nose and under-jaw, used by the Mexicans and mustangers, under which the wildest horse generally becomes submissive.

Southerners, like the Magoffins, had, of course, brought side-saddles with them, even though they had not had the mounts to put them on. With a light and active spring Louisiana Dupre leaped from Thornley's assisting hand to her seat, and gathered up her reins.

Thornley untwisted the *hakimo* which was outside of the bridle, and the half-tamed mustang made a great leap, and sprang forward in a mad race. Half-tamed, we say, but it is all the taming nine horses out of ten get in Texas. A good choke, half an hour's fight with a pair of spurs a foot long, and a remorseless centaur to use them, and the creature gives in, and is pronounced "*domado*"—tamed. But Louisiana Dupre was as good a rider, almost, as her cousin Tennie, and soon brought her spotted mare to submission. The exercise had brought the color to her cheek, the fire to her eye, and all her melancholy was gone for the nonce, as she galloped up to the colonel and inquired:

"How do you like my mare, uncle? Isn't she splendid?"

"Very pretty, indeed, my dear," said the colonel, patting the mare's neck. "You ride splendidly, Louie."

"Thank you, sir," she said. "Now, I think I'll ride over and look after Eugene. The poor boy may be hungry, for I don't believe he'll shoot much here."

"I heard his gun and Strother's half an hour ago," answered the colonel. "I guess they must have killed something, for Strother's an old hand at decoying turkeys. They ought to be here now pretty soon."

At this minute, Tennessee Magoffin came racing up at full speed, and checked her horse abruptly opposite.

"Father," she said, eagerly, her face full of anxiety, "Mr. Strother's coming across the river leading Eugene's horse, and I don't see Eugene. Something has happened to him, I'm certain. Perhaps he's hurt himself. He always is so venturesome. Oh! father, if he should be hurt!"

"Nonsense, you silly child," said the colonel, a little uneasy nevertheless. "They shot too much game to carry, I suppose, and Eugene has stayed by it to keep it from the coyotes. Don't be frightened about nothing."

"Oh! do you think so?" said Tennie, relieved.

"I'll go down right off and ask Mr. Strother."

"Don't ye do it, Miss Tennie," cried old Wash, earnestly; "that ar' bank ain't fit fur a lady to ride down, leave alone on a fresh-caught hoss. I'm a-goin'. Don't you do it for your life, I say."

The old hunter's eager manner impressed Tennie so much that she unwillingly remained where she was, while old Wash plunged down the bank on foot, a prey to anxiety he had hidden successfully.

"What are it, neighbor?" he asked, eagerly, as Strother slowly rode up to the bank through the ford; "are anything happe'd to the young 'un? Whar is he?"

"Gone!" said Strother, with a hollow groan; "gone! And snapped up by them hell-hounds of Injuns, I b'lieve. 'Twarn't a half-hour ago, as we parted t'other side o' that motte. He went one way, I t'other, round. I heered his gun and went thar. Hyar's all I found."

And he exhibited the elegant silver-mounted fowling-piece, which Eugene had taken so much pride in that very day.

"Take me to the place," said Wash, eagerly. "Durn the gobbler. Throw 'em down hyar, and I'll take his hoss. You and me, neighbor, we'll ferret out who did this devilry afore we're a day older. Weepins in order, say?"

"You bet," replied Strother, laconically. The advent of a brother spirit as keen as Wash Carrol, had altered the look of affairs to his apprehension. He threw down the turkeys on the ground, and Wash Carrol jumped on the pretty thoroughbred that had been Eugene's, and rode back into the ford.

"What 'll the colonel say?" suddenly asked Strother, pausing. "Hain't we oughter go back and tell him fust?"

"Whar's the use?" said Wash, gruffly. "He'll know it soon 'nuff. Bad news flies, neighbor. Besides, he knows me well enough ter trust me ter do the squar' thing."

And so the two hunters, one so gigantic, the other so diminutive, pursued their way in company over the stream and rode together to the place where Strother had found the abandoned gun.

Here Wash Carrol leaped to the ground, throwing the bridle of his horse to his companion.

He went down on his hands and knees, and examined the tracks all round with the closest attention, even snuffing at them as a hound might. Strother carefully and silently kept the two horses back from interfering with his movements, and watched him with close attention as a connoisseur in the art.

Finally Wash rose to his feet as if satisfied, and followed the horse-tracks for about twenty feet, when he halted.

"What d' you make o' this hyar, neighbor?" he demanded, turning to Strother.

The overseer laconically answered: "Injuns lassoed him."

"Ay; any fool c'u'd tell that," replied Carrol: "but 'tain't every one as could tell this hyar blood warn't his'n."

"How d'yer know?" asked the overseer, incredulously.

"Cause why. Don't you see these hyar fore-feet is plum above that ar' pool, and the drops go on the track all on one side? Now, ef it had a' been his'n 'twould a' been hyar, whar they dragged his body nigh twenty feet over the grass. No, that ar' blood's hoss's blood. They must a' come on him suddint-like, so he fired in a hurry and mebbe hit one of thar hosses a skelp. Then they twitched him with the larryett, and put like sixty to git behind that ar' motte. Thar's whar we've got to go. Got a six-shooter?"

"You bet!" replied the overseer, in his usual laconic style, exhibiting the weapon, at that time not near as common as now.

"Let's git, then!" was Wash's remark, as he loosened his own revolver in the holster, and cocked his rifle. Then he started off on the trail of the horses at a jog-trot, Strother following with the two steeds.

"Took him up hyar," remarked Wash, as the broad track that had been made by poor Eugene's body suddenly ceased. "Only three on 'em, all told."

And he pointed to the tracks of three horses of different sizes, but all evidently unshod, that composed the trail to the motte.

"Thur mustangs—hey?" said Strother, interrogatively, as he marked the three tracks.

"Yes. Thur mustangs," answered Wash, in an abstracted tone. But he did not seem to be at all satisfied on the subject. He went on slowly muttering to himself, and finally turned round, and said:

"Neighbor, air you some on a trail?"

"Kudn't say I are," replied Strother, modestly; "I hev done a wheen of it in my time, howsumdever."

"Tell me," said Wash, pausing, "what's the differ between a white man's and an Injun's ridin'?"

"White man keeps his hoss more on his hunkies," said the overseer, promptly, "'special' ef he be a greaser. Injun goes lollopy-lollop."

"Good!" said Wash, with a grunt. "Neighbor, you are some on a trail. You ar' got gump-tion, you hev. Git down hyar, and take a squint, and tell me what you think o' this 'ere."

And he pointed to something on the track which Strother could not see from his horse's back. The overseer got down from his animal, and examined the trail closely.

"See hyar," said Wash, pointing to the tracks as he spoke, to illustrate his meaning, "hyar are three hoss-tracks. Two on 'em is even, but this hyar goes deeper abint than afore. So I say, that ar' hoss war ridden by a white man with a sharp bit. What d'ye think, neighbor?"

"Looks reasonable," admitted Strother; "but, how does a white man come hyar, consortin' with Injuns?"

"There are sich cusses as him a'most enny-wheers," said Wash, gravely; "morely, we've got a pardner down at the corral, as me and Ed hev suspicioned a long time. Say, neighbor, war ye ever in Loozyanny?"

He asked the question with curious abruptness, and the overseer answered it with his usual brevity.

"You bet."

"Did ye ever know a cuss thar of the name of Louis Lebar? A short, chunky fellow, a'most as black as a nigger, with a black beard over his face. Mout a' bin a Portugee, from his looks."

"No!" said Strother, briefly.

Wash looked a little disappointed. He threw up his rifle on his shoulder, and marched off along the track in silence, till they were close to the motte of timber.

"Look out, neighbor," growled Strother; "mout be Injuns in thar. Best git on yer hoss. Track's plain 'nuff."

Wash Carrol made no answer. He hastened forward, still on foot, with his rifle ready to fire at a moment's notice. He saw at the corner of the motte something which promised a clew.

A clew it was, plain enough.

The very identical plug of tobacco which Tiger Tail had received from Colonel Magoffin, lay there in the grass, amid the confused trampling footsteps of a number of horses.

"Tiger Tail, by the jumping Jehosaphat!" cried Wash. "Now, don't you git into no sweat, neighbor; we'll hev that boy back before long, or I'm durned. That's fair! I know whar he is. He ain't kilt—he ain't. He's only gobbled, to see ef they kaint git some ransom out of the cunnel. The or'nary! Guess I know a trick wuth two o' his. Look hyar, neighbor! The hull band was hyar waitin', and they've vamoosed the ranch as soon as they got the young feller safe. Thar's the track, straight into Tiger Tail's camp."

And he pointed to a broad, plain trail of many hoofs that led off from the corner of the track straight to the Cross Timbers.

"How many fellers has this Tiger Tail?" asked Strother of his companion, as they stood watching the track.

"Bout a hundred and fifty," said Wash.

"Why shedn't we make a party, and ride into the cuss's hole, and make him give up the young feller?" demanded Strother.

Wash turned eagerly round.

"Will you make one of sich a party, neighbor?" he asked.

"I will that!" replied Strother, emphatically.

"We've got our weepins, and no one ain't a-goin' through us so durned quick as this comes to. Come, stranger, let us be hoofin' it. We'll hev bad news and good to tell the cunnel, but we mout as well git all the help we kin, fur 'twon't be so easy to skeer that 'ere Tiger Tail, without four or five six-shooters a-pointin' at his head."

"Neighbor, you're a hoss!" said Wash, heartily. "Give us yer claw."

The gigantic Tennessean grasped the other's hand with a force that made it tingle. He and Wash remounted their horses and galloped back to camp, where they found all in the greatest commotion. Tennie Magoffin was wild with apprehension, and the colonel had all his men armed, and ready for an assault. When Wash and Strother rode into camp, and told their story, proposing the plan, there was not a dissentient voice in the whole party.

Putting the women into the half completed

block-house, and consigning them to the care of four well-armed negroes, the colonel, Strother, Thornley, Carrol, and eight of the negroes, all armed to the teeth, set off to beard the tiger in his den.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE BLACK STALLION.

In a deep recess or bay, formed by two jutting projections or spurs of the Cross Timbers, lay the camp of the vagabond Seminole chief. It was surrounded on all sides, except the front, by the low, scrubby vegetation of the Timbers. Close-stunted oak, hickory, and black-jack rising to an average height of about twelve feet, and closely covered below with thorny underbrush, formed a curtain of defense, impenetrable except with the ax. Within the bay, which might have contained some fifty acres, was spread the camp of Tiger Tail, numbering between fifty and sixty lodges.

The tent of the chief himself was dignified by a pole in front, on which dangled a row of scalps, the flowing light hair on more than one attesting that it had been torn from the head of a white woman. Tiger Tail's lodge was of the largest kind, and contained over a dozen women of various degrees of comeliness, for the Seminoles are a handsome race of Indians. Several of them were lounging round the door, nursing papooses, and watching the boys of the camp at play on the green in front.

The camp was almost denuded of warriors, and there were but few horses feeding outside; but the word had just been passed that Tiger Tail was returning, and the urchins of the camp ran yelling out to welcome the warriors.

In they came at full gallop, brandishing their spears, and yelling for triumph, headed by the chief himself, who bore across his horse's withers a bound and helpless form.

Tiger Tail rode up to his lodge, and threw himself from his horse, when he roughly pulled off the prisoner, and dropped him on the ground, like a bale of goods.

Then it might be seen that the captive was a white man, dressed in the blue cottonade blouse and trowsers of a Louisiana Creole, his head swathed in a red blanket, that completely blinded him. The next man to Tiger Tail was the Black Mustang, riding a freshly-caught wild horse, of great beauty, which he checked on its haunches, with a powerful Spanish bit, as he said, in a low voice:

"I must go now, chief. Keep him safe, and on no account let him know that I am your friend. I will disarm suspicion by going to the corral. Those fools will never find out. Remember, to-night, before they get their block-house ready. Good-by. I will take the short cut through the timber."

"Good!" said Tiger Tail, briefly; "my young men will be there."

Lebar dashed the spurs into his horse's sides, and galloped off to the very end of the bay. Here several narrow paths were to be seen, that had been cut through the underbrush, in past times, by the Seminoles, as a means of escape if they were attacked by superior forces. One and all were quite invisible until you were close to them.

Lebar appeared to know his way well, for he chose one of the paths without any hesitation, and forced the unwilling horse to his utmost speed along the narrow, tortuous way.

In ten minutes' rapid riding he gained the edge of the Cross Timbers, at another point, and beheld before him, at a mile's distance, the mustanger's corral, of which he was supposed to be in charge.

A glance assured him that the corral was intact, and the captured herd still safe, and then he tore away toward them at the best speed the maddened mustang was capable of, and reached the gate in about two minutes.

Here he pulled up the horse with such a jerk of the bit, that the animal reared violently up, pawed the air for a moment, and went over backward to the ground.

But Lebar, though a poor hand with the lasso, was by no means a bad rider. He slipped out of the saddle, and stood by the fallen steed, unhurt, as the poor creature, trembling and exhausted, arose and stood quaking and covered with sweat before his conqueror.

The Black Mustang took down the bars, and led the horse into the corral, turning him loose, after unsaddling, all reeking as he was.

"Lucky for me those fellows haven't come back," he said to himself, as he looked at the exhausted animal. "They might have suspected something, if they had seen me galloping about

out there. I wonder how long it will be before they find out the loss of young Dupre? Curse him! I'll have him killed for what he said to me once. Thank Heaven! he didn't see me. If Tiger Tail lets him go for a ransom, it would have been awkward if he had recognized me. Old Magoffin might have pulled up stakes, and gone for those Regulators, and where should I have gone then? No one at that camp knows me, except her and her brother. The rest are all Tennesseans. Heigho! It's slow work waiting for those two fellows. Wonder what they can find so interesting at the Magoffins' camp."

He went to the top of one of the swells, and looked out in the direction of the emigrant encampment. For some time nothing was to be seen, but at last he caught a glimpse of a horseman's head, followed by several others, coming over the top of a swell, several miles off, and heading toward Tiger Tail's camp, by the prairie way.

By this path, the distance from Magoffin's to the Seminole village was at least six miles, whereas by the short cut through the Cross Timbers, of which Lebar alone knew, it was only about two and a half.

The Black Mustang watched the cavalcade with close attention, counting the numbers. He counted twelve figures, and recognized the diminutive figure of Wash Carrol, and the huge form of the overseer in advance.

"They've found it out," muttered Lebar, excitedly. "They must be going in search of him. Perhaps to offer Tiger Tail a heavy ransom. Ha! ha! He'll ask enough to sicken old Magoffin of the Cross Timbers. I've primed him well."

He continued to watch the distant horsemen, who were going at a loping gallop, straight toward Tiger Tail's village, till they were hidden from sight by a swell of land.

"I wonder what they'll say to the chief," muttered he. "If he only knew they were coming he might arrange a surprise for them. Why not? I'm the nearest still, by four miles, and I can warn him in time. Why shouldn't we bag the whole crowd of them, Wash Carrol and all? Then I might be rich. By heavens! 'tis a good plan! I'll try it. But I shall need a swift horse in case there's any hitch. My own beast is good, but he's only a mule. I guess I'll catch a fresh mustang. I'll have plenty of time."

The Black Mustang turned round and picked up his long lariat from where it lay by his saddle. He climbed over the bars of the gate, and advanced toward the captured herd, which was quietly feeding near the pond. His appearance produced a stampede as usual, and again the animals huddled together against the fence in the corner, kicking and squealing. Lebar selected his mark, a fine steel-gray young stallion, and advanced close to the herd.

But he was by no means skillful enough with the lasso. In order to keep the noose open, he whirled it round his head, and increased the terror of the horses to such an extent by the gesture that they broke loose from the corner and made a mad plunge past him in wild terror. As they dashed by, Lebar threw his lasso with no very accurate aim into the midst of the sea of tossing heads. The next minute he felt himself jerked from the ground, the rope cutting into his waist, while he was dragged along the whole length of the corral, receiving many bruises in the operation, till the frantic horse stopped in the corner of the corral, backing away to the end of his tether.

Lebar gathered himself up, cursing furiously. He was a man of great personal strength and savage temper, and from that moment forgot everything, for some time, but his desire of revenge on the horse. He found that he had lassoed a splendid black stallion by accident, one of the leaders of the herd, the noose having caught the wild horse round the neck, where it had slipped up close to his head.

"I'll fix you, curse you!" bellowed the infuriated mustanger, as he rose to his feet, smarting from his wounds, and began to pull up, by main force, to the frightened horse. But his furious gestures produced a bad result. The wild horse, to be approached successfully, needs caution and patience, and Lebar's gestures frightened the wild stallion to such an extent that he made a second desperate break away to the middle of the corral, dragging the Black Mustang after him, in spite of his desperate struggles to hold back. It was not for fully ten minutes that Lebar could get near him, and then the horse dropped on the earth, nearly dead from suffocation.

The mustanger came up, hand-over-hand, and loosened the noose to allow the horse to breathe.

He began to wish he had taken his slow old mule, after all, but it was too late now. He must make up for lost time by fast riding. When he loosened the noose the wild stallion slowly rose, with an air of bewilderment, and made but little resistance on his way to the gate. Lebar let down the rails, and the stallion bounded through the opening with a joyful neigh, nearly dragging the mustanger off his feet again in his efforts to escape. He did drag him so far from the gate that Lebar had no time to put up the barrier again till the stallion fell a second time from strangulation. But the Black Mustang had recovered his coolness, and secured the lasso to a tree before he liberated the animal, when he left him to rise, while he put up the bars again.

"Curse you!" he muttered, vindictively, as he again approached the horse, with his saddle over his arm; "you shall pay for this presently."

But, as if in scorn of his words, the black stallion let fly both heels at him as he approached, with a violence that would have ended Louis Lebar's days then and there but for a timely spring backward.

Then the mustanger did what he ought to have done at first. He hauled on the lasso for the third time, and pulled up to the horse's head, the animal straining chokingly on the cord, till he got near enough to put his hand over the creature's nose and breathe into its nostrils. The effect on the wild horse was apparent. It ceased to struggle, and submitted, trembling, to be saddled, while Lebar inserted the noose of the *hakimo* into its mouth, twisting the under jaw and nose with merciless violence.

With all his best endeavors, however, imitating the tactics of Carrol as near as he knew how, it was fully a quarter of an hour more of struggles, all of them induced by his own clumsiness and savage violence, before he at last succeeded in throwing his leg over the back of the wild stallion, with a bridle in his mouth.

When he did, the real struggle commenced. No longer under the choking restraint of the *hakimo*, the wild steed was at full liberty to use its best efforts to unseat its rider. It proceeded to use them as well as it knew how.

Back jumps from the ground with all four legs stiff, a combination of the leap and a kick in the air, whirled round and round, standing almost erect on the hind legs, only to make a spring from them; all these various tricks did the wild horse try.

Lebar kept a tight gripe on the pommel of the saddle or the floating mane of the horse, and managed to retain his seat, though with great difficulty, answering every effort of the charger with a fresh dig of his huge spurs.

He did not ride like a Mexican *vaquero*. The latter would have sat erect like a tower, with loose bridle, laughing at the horse's mad efforts, secure in his seat. But he did ride sufficiently well to stick on somehow, till the stallion had exhausted himself, when the Black Mustang drove in the spurs for the last time, and sent his charger off in a wild burst of speed toward the hidden path in the Cross Timbers.

Once the wild horse is got to his speed, his conquest is certain. The harder he runs, the quicker will he exhaust himself. Lebar smiled grimly as he wiped the sweat from his dark, forbidding-looking face, and spurred the conquered beast harder than ever.

The creature seemed to fly over the prairie, and less than two minutes brought him to the secret path, into which his rider dashed. Once out of sight in the scrub timber, however, Lebar began to draw on the bit, and brought his animal to a slower gallop, under which he arrived at the Seminole camp.

When he pulled up at the edge of the clearing, he saw that he was too late. The party of white men was just riding into the camp.

CHAPTER XV.

BEARING THE TIGER.

"Now, cunnel," said Wash Carrol, in a low tone, as he rode into the outskirts of the Seminole camp, "you jest leave this hyar biz to me. I know this hyar sneakin' cuss well. Will yer do as I tell yer?"

"I will, Wash, on the honor of a gentleman," said the colonel, earnestly. "You know the Indians better than I do. But, oh! Wash, suppose they've killed him! How shall I ever face his poor sister again?"

"He ain't dead, cunnel; 'I'll swa'r't. Ef they'd 'a' killed him, we'd 'a' found his karkidge, already skulped. Leave 'ter me and my neighbor hyar, and do as we does or tells yer."

The colonel nodded silently, and the little

party rode into the camp of the Seminoles. Not a single motion was made, as the white men and negroes rode in; but they were met with scowling and lowering glances on every side.

Wash Carrol rode on, entirely aware of the danger he was running, but equally resolved to meet it at any cost, rode straight up to the lodge of Tiger Tail.

"Now, cunnel," said Wash, hurriedly, "you and your crowd stay on hossback; keep your eyes skinned, and be ready to blaze away into the cusses when I gives the word. Me and my neighbor, hyar, will do the torking."

He leisurely dismounted from his horse, along with Strother, and the two advanced to the chief's front, with their rifles thrown back over the hollow of the left arm. Wash Carrol then drew from his belt the very same plug of tobacco which he had found by the mottle-side, all trampled with horse-hoofs as it was, and threw it down at the chief's feet.

"Whar do you think I found that, chief?" he asked, abruptly.

Tiger Tail looked up for the first time, and gave a grunt. It was his only answer.

"I found it by the tracks that told me as how you'd been a-stealin' away the young white chief," said Wash, firmly. "Where have you got him?"

Tiger Tail gave another grunt. His eyes burned like live coals as he surveyed the puny frame of the hunter.

"Who you, anyway?"

Wash turned a little red, and his eyes twinkled with anger, but he merely nodded to the gigantic overseer, who advanced and took up the word. Strother's deep voice, like the growl of a bear, addressed the Indian:

"See hyar, you! You come to our camp this mornin' and we treated yer like a gentleman, didn't we? Answer that, ef ye kin—say!"

Tiger Tail grunted contemptuously.

"No," he said; "want whisky and powder. Much heap. Get bit blanket, lilly bit 'baccer."

"We giv ye what we could," said Strother. "We done no whisky to spar." Well, what hev ye hed? Ye've stole away jest the nicest young feller as lives in this hyar State, and ye've put his family into mournin' for fear ye mout hev killed him. What did yer do it for, say?"

"Whar is he, say?" also demanded Wash.

Tiger Tail's eyes blazed again, but he made no sign of moving yet. He felt too secure in the numbers of his warriors, and never dreamed of the desperate courage of the whites. His lip curled in an insolent smile, as he said:

"Want much heap whisky, much powder for him."

Wash Carrol made a rapid signal with his eyes to Strother. The next moment the giant's grasp was on the chief's shoulder, thence transferred to his long hair, by which he plucked him to his feet as if he had been a child. The cold muzzle of a revolver was pressed against the Indian's temple, as Wash hissed forth:

"Call fur help, and I'll scatter yer brains over yer squaws, darn yer painted skin. WHAR'S THAT BOY?"

CHAPTER XVI.

THE REGULATORS.

A BAND of men were just breaking camp in the prairie at the dawn of that day. They were many miles to the south-east of the Cross Timbers, but the broad trail of their previous day's march evinced that that was their direction. Horses and men were alike tough and hardy in appearance, eminently fitted for their wild prairie life. The horses were all half-bred between the small, wiry, spirited mustang, and the tall, large-boned "States horse," the product being an animal, unequalled in any part of the world, as a hunter or cavalry horse.

Round-bodied, clean-limbed, sturdy and swift, full of fire and endurance, these Texan cross-bred horses are often known to do their eighty miles a day, on nothing but prairie grass, for a week at a stretch.

Their riders were all of the hunter class, rough-bearded men, clad in buck-skin, and heavily armed. All carried revolvers, some boasting a pair of these formidable weapons, while the unrivaled Sharp breech-loading rifle was to be seen in the hands of many of them, supplanting the old-fashioned pea rifle.

The band numbered eighty men all told, and the sound of a bugle, blowing "To horse," proved that some sort of military discipline was observed by these wild-looking frontiersmen.

The leader of the party, was, perhaps, the least conspicuous-looking of all, as far as regarded personal strength. He was a small, quiet-looking man, with sandy hair, streaked with gray, having a gray eye of remarkable

calmness and steady power of gaze. His dress was more civilized than that of the rest, but sufficiently plain. His gray hat and gray homespun coat, with high horseman's boots, coming up to mid-thigh, were those of an ordinary farmer or hunter of the South.

The only marks of rank he appeared to possess were the beauty of his silver-mounted revolvers, and a Colt's repeating rifle at his back. But his orders, given in a low, quiet, conversational tone, were obeyed implicitly by the borderers, who addressed him as "Colonel;" one or two of them substituting the denominations of "Sheriff," or "Mr. Hays."

This man was no other than the celebrated "Jack Hays," the most successful Indian-fighter of Texas in his time. In the early days of the Lone Star State, before its admission to the Union, his name had been a terror to Mexicans and horse-thieves alike, and it was under his leadership that the terrible band, known as the "Regulators," had been so successful in suppressing the more atrocious class of criminals who flocked to Texas, as a land of promise for thieves and murderers.

By office, Hays was now Sheriff of Texas at large, with a sort of roving commission to execute murderers and thieves, wherever found; and the forms of law were always satisfied, in case of a capture, by a summary jury trial, the jury being chosen by lot from among the Regulators themselves.

At a second bugle signal the band mounted in military style, and moved off to the north-west in a column of fours, as regularly as trained dragoons. Sheriff Hays rode at their head, talking to a dark, Indian-looking man, who was in reality a French half-breed from Louisiana.

"You say that you are certain he was the man we're after, Baptiste?" said Hays, interrogatively, as they rode along. "Remember that we don't like to make any mistakes. Our justice is so swift, it must be unerring."

"Quite sure, colonel," said the half-breed, confidently. "From the description the tavern-keeper gave, I'll swear its Antonio Miquelez. Just his height and build, and his trick of rolling his eyes, when he was startled. His arrest and conviction are certain, if we can get him to New Orleans. The coroner's jury didn't rise from their seats after the evidence was in. *Mille tonnerres!* colonel, I hope he'll get his deserts! The young man he killed was a splendid fellow, I wish he was safe in New Orleans."

"If it's the right man, I don't think he'll get as far as that," said the sheriff, dryly. "We'll settle his hash here."

"So much the better, colonel. *Pardieu*, I should like to see him dangling at the end of a short rope."

"We shall kill two birds with one stone up here, if I don't mistake," remarked Hays, presently. "There's a band of Seminoles, who've left their reservation, and come down poaching on the Comanche hunting-grounds. If we find them, I've got orders to 'jump' their ranch, if they won't go back peaceably."

The half-breed looked puzzled.

"Jump the ranch? I don't understand."

"Kill 'em all, except those that beg," exclaimed the sheriff.

The band of Regulators continued their march with such rapidity that by sunset they were within ten miles of the Cross Timbers, where they went into camp by the borders of the same stream that washed the side of Magoffin's Claim.

CHAPTER XVII.

A BOLD STROKE.

AGREEABLY to preconcerted plan, the colonel and Edward Thornley pushed their horses forward, to screen the scene with Tiger Tail from the sight of the warriors in the other lodges, while they threatened the squaws with cocked revolvers, to keep them from screaming for help.

The whole thing passed so quickly, that Tiger Tail saw himself surrounded by threatening foes, and when he felt the mastering gripe, and read the pitiless sternness of the faces round him, the Indian chief cowered. Wash Carrol saw his face assume the expression he was looking for so eagerly—that of abject terror.

"Let go," he said, quickly; and the obedient overseer in a moment relaxed his gripe.

"Now, look hyar," said Wash, fiercely, but in a low tone; "you give us that ar' boy and yer safe. Lie to us, and I'll bore a hole right through yer. *Whar is he?*"

The brutal insolence was gone, as the chief said, in a low voice, that trembled in spite of himself. "Behind. In lodge."

Wash looked round to see if the warriors suspected anything yet. Any moment might bring a general rush.

"Now, look hyar," said the hunter, in a low, savage tone; "you keep a still tongue in your head, and ef yer warriors come pokin' round hyar, *order 'em back*. Keep yer wimmin critters quiet, too. Neighbor, ef he utters a squeak, *plug him*, and then put like all creation."

The last words were uttered to Strother, who gave a grim smile, and renewed his grasp on the Indian's shoulder, while he drew and cocked his revolver with the other hand. He had dropped his rifle when he first seized the Seminole.

Wash Carrol dove into the lodge door, and found, as the chief had said, Eugene Dupre, bound hand and foot, with a gag in his mouth.

The hunter eagerly cut the young man's bonds, and raised him to his feet, but Eugene was so stiff he could hardly stand. Carrol supported him outside. The colonel would have jumped down to welcome the returned one, but for the hunter's warning.

"Don't ye stir, cunnel. We aren't through this mess yet. Keep yer eyes skinned, I tell yer, for ye'll need 'em presently. Now we was a pack o' duration fools that we didn't bring a hoss for Mister Doopray, hyar. Never mind. You stay hyar."

The reckless hunter left the lodge, and walked boldly up to a handsome spotted stallion, whose jaguar-skin trappings announced him to be the chief's. The animal stood by a lodge close by, hitched to a spear, driven into the ground.

Without any hesitation Wash plucked up the spear, and led the animal up to Eugene.

"Hyar, young feller," he said; "turn about's fair play. Git outside o' that critter's back. The chief won't mind it."

And he helped Eugene to leap on the back of the Indian charger, without stirrups or hit as it was, a light rein of plaited horse-hair encircling its under jaw.

Wash Carrol then came up close to Tiger Tail, and pointed the pistol once more to his head.

"You'll come with us, chief," he said, quietly, but with a wicked glitter in his eye. "Tain't safe to trust yer loose till we're *outer gunshot*."

Tiger Tail made no answer, except a sullen, vindictive glare. Like a savage dog who has been choked nigh to death, the fight was taken out of the Seminole, under Wash Carrol's eye.

"Hyar, neighbor," said the hunter to Strother; "you are as strong as a bull bueffer. Git on yer critter, and carry this cuss off, as a hostage. I'll do the rest."

Strother uttered a grim laugh, and turned away to mount his horse, a huge, heavy, powerful beast, of Pennsylvanian breed.

He stooped and lifted the young chief to the pommel, as if he had been a child; while Wash Carrol leaped on his own animal, and rode round in face of the whole camp.

The Seminoles had become suspicious that something was going on, and had begun to crowd toward that part of the camp, when to them suddenly appeared the whole party, wheeling round with cocked rifles, while Wash Carrol called out in the Comanche language, which the Seminoles all understood.

"If a warrior fires a shot, we kill Tiger Tail. Drop your arms!"

"Then, in English, he shouted:

"Forward, cunnel! Give 'em blazes ef they fire a shot."

The whole party broke into a gallop, and passed through the camp—Strother with a cocked pistol held close to the Seminole chief's head. The Indians, as if stupefied, allowed them to pass unchallenged, till they were a hundred yards out in the open prairie.

Then Strother threw the chief to the ground without any further ceremony, and the whole party put spurs to their horses and mules (for the most of the negroes were only mounted on the colonel's draft mules), and tore away down the prairie at their best speed.

The chief struggled to his feet as soon as they had passed, and ran toward the camp, yelling: "Shoot! Shoot! Kill them, warriors!"

The Seminole warriors came running from their camp, with a loud yell, and poured a scattering volley, but their fire was wholly ineffectual, only eliciting a shout of derision, from whites and negroes alike.

Wash Carrol, alone, pulled up his horse, and sprang to the ground to take a flying shot. He drew a bead on the person of Tiger Tail, as the chief fled toward his camp, and had the satisfaction of seeing the Indian halt and stumble forward, as if he was hit.

There was a tremendous rushing about and yelling in the camp; and all the braves were soon mounted, and dashing out on the prairie, but only some fifty of them followed the emigrant party, and these maintained a respectful distance from the long-range rifles, contenting

themselves with an occasional change of shots, slowly following at a foot-pace, on the way to Magoffin's Claim.

Meanwhile, Louis Lebar had been waiting behind the screen of timber, in keen anxiety, the result of the colonel's visit.

He commanded a view of the Seminole chief's hut, and ground his teeth with vexation, when he saw the success of Wash Carroll's bold plan.

He sat on his horse, muttering maledictions on the hunter's head, but not daring to stir, till the confusion of the rush came, when he galloped headlong into the camp.

He was just in time to stop Tiger Tail; who, wild for revenge, and bleeding from a slight flesh-wound in the leg, was for rushing off on Magoffin's track at once. Lebar stopped him with a word.

"Fool!" he cried; "have you forgotten the white squaw I promised you? Now is your time. We can reach the white man's camp in half the time they could at full gallop; and carry off the squaws before they get there. See, now! Send out fifty men under Ravenswing, to follow that party; harness them, and exchange shots, so as to delay them. The rest of us will go back by the secret path, and reach the camp before any one can intercept us, carry off the girls, and run off the stock of captured mustangs from the corral. There is no time to lose. Let us fly."

Tiger Tail's eyes gleamed with devilish glee, as he took in the full import of the proposition.

"Good!" he grunted; "the Black Mustang's words are like rain in the drought."

He mounted a spare horse, and dashed about among the braves, giving the necessary orders.

The lodges were hurriedly struck by the squaws who began to move camp at once to a remote stronghold of theirs, in the heart of the Cross Timbers. Tiger Tail himself and a hundred of his best warriors galloped off by the secret path through the Timbers, as hard as they could go, following the lead of Louis Lebar, whose black eyes gleamed with wolfish glee as he saw himself ready at last to swoop down on the sheep-fold, where dwelt the ewe-lamb he coveted.

Away went the Black Mustang and his wicked crew, wild for revenge, plunder and lust—the Black Mustang, on his sable stallion, outstripping all near him in speed.

The sun was just setting, and Magoffin was still about four miles from his camp. The pursuing Indians had grown very troublesome, riding up close and firing incessantly, but always fleeing from a direct attack.

The progress of the party had been very slow in consequence, and the colonel began to look very grave as he thought of the distance yet to be traveled.

Suddenly he heard, far away in the direction of his own camp, the sounds of firing, growing quite brisk as it swelled up into a volley, and then dying away. Magoffin turned pale.

"My God! Wash," he cried, "they must have attacked the girls! What shall we do? If we run these fellows will be on us in a minute, and we shall do no good."

Wash listened intently before he said:

"See hyar, cunnel. I hev done one job up brown to-day. Let me do another. Me and my kumrad here is well mounted. These hyar mules is kussid slow, but you don't want fast work now. Me and Ed, we'll git like all creation, and you keep them cusses from follerin'. Come, Ed."

The two mustangers, bending over their horses' necks, shot away over the prairie toward the unfinished block-house, whence the sound of shots now rose again.

CHAPTER XVIII.

TWO BRAVE GIRLS.

WE must return to Magoffin's Claim to see what had been going on there in the meantime.

Tennie Magoffin had seemed to alter her character completely, as soon as she found the great misfortune that had overtaken her lover. Perhaps, for the first time, she realized that Eugene Dupre was more to her than a cousin. His poor sister, Louisiana, seemed to be utterly overcome, and sat in a sort of stupor, unable to do anything but brood.

Before the colonel departed, he gave strict injunctions to all present to keep close to the block-house, and obey Miss Tennie as himself. Merry, light-hearted Tennie, in this emergency, proved herself as brave as her father.

She superintended the removal of all the household goods within the walls of the block-

house; and ordered the wagons and "Dearborn" drawn up to cover the entrance. The women and children were all brought inside the inclosure, the few animals being penned in between the steep banks of the river on one side, and the wagons and block-house on the other. The little space that remained open was closed with a fence of ropes and sticks, hastily constructed, that served to keep in the animals only while they did not press against it, but was powerless against a stampede.

Tennie had just four men, armed with muskets to depend on, in case of an assault, but the walls of the block-house were a complete protection against bullets. The absence of loopholes to shoot from was a serious objection, but there was a platform near the top of the wall for the men to look over; but their heads and shoulders would be uncovered in firing.

The colonel had had no anticipation of an assault while he was away, but his daughter was wiser, or more apprehensive. No sooner had he gone than she commenced her preparations for defense, not sorry, perhaps, for the occupation which served to distract her thoughts from her own troubles.

As the work progressed, and every thing was made snug, Tennie's spirits rose, almost involuntarily, and she found herself thinking hopefully of Eugene's return, and consoling his poor sister.

While in the act of cheering her, Louisiana suddenly started up and listened intently.

"Hush!" she said; "I hear something."

She hurried out into the open prairie, to a knoll that overlooked the river, toward which the afternoon breeze brought down the sound of distant shots.

"They are fighting," whispered Louie. "Oh! Holy Mother of Heaven, protect poor Eugene! He is all I have left now."

Tennie listened anxiously. There was no mistaking the sound. The sharp crack! crack! of rifles, and the heavier reports of muskets, echoing backward and forward, announced that some sort of a fight was going on.

Tennie and her cousin listened for several minutes, during which the sounds grew sensibly plainer and nearer.

"They are coming in," said Tennie. "Heaven grant that Eugene is with them! My father said he would not return without him."

"They are being driven in," said Louie, sadly. "Perhaps they may be overpowered before they get here. If not, how thankful we ought to be for that block-house, so nearly finished."

Tennie made no answer. She was listening to the firing, which had just died away when she was interrupted by a violent pull of the arm from her cousin. She looked round in surprise, as Louie Dupre, pale as marble, and with dilated eyes, pointed out over the prairie in their rear.

Not a quarter of a mile off, and coming down, full gallop, for the block-house, was a perfect cloud of Indians, with gleaming lances, headed by Tiger Tail, as they could plainly see from the jaguar-skin robe he wore. But in front even of Tiger Tail, and mounted on a black mustang, was a short, sturdy figure, with a face as dark as a mulatto, and a bushy black beard, dressed as a Mexican mustanger, and heavily armed.

"*Tis he, Migueles, Oscar's murderer!* Eugene is dead. Let me die, too, now."

And Louie would have sunk powerless to the earth in her palsy of terror, but for the supporting arm of her cousin, who, now that real danger was afoot, acted with all the cool courage of her race.

"Keep up, Louie," she said, sternly; "don't be a fool. We must get to the block-house before they can catch us."

She started on a run for the block-house, half dragging Louisiana with her. As they ran along for the shelter, the Indians, for the first time, raised a yell, but before the latter could get within a hundred yards of the place, Tennie was inside, and the four men left in charge were on the top of the platform.

As the whole body of Indians came rushing tumultuously on, the sudden reports of four muskets, from the top of the wall of the block-house, was followed by that of a rifle in the hands of Tennie herself, and the whole mass of assailants wavered, halted, and fell back, with several wounded men among them.

Tennie felt immensely relieved at the result, and encouraged her defenders to the utmost.

Tiger Tail ordered his men to spread out in a line, and attack the block-house by firing at it. The whistling of the bullets soon became so close around the ears of the defenders that they were compelled to dodge down behind the parapet, and could not fire steadily for fear of being shot themselves.

Tennie realized that the position was growing dangerous. Every time she put up her head to look, the Indian line was getting closer to them, and extending further round, so as to surround the wagons and command what could be seen of the narrow doorway, under the wheels of the vehicles. The quick-witted girl jumped down from her place, and ran to Louie.

"Can you shoot, coz?" she asked, anxiously. "A little," said Louisiana Dupre, rising from where she knelt, trying to comfort a shrieking child. "I will do all I can, Tennie."

"We have plenty of muskets and pistols, but no one to use them," said Tennie. "We must do something, or we'll never hold out till father comes back. Here, Aunt Hannah, Nancy, Vinny, you must help us shoot, or we shall all be murdered."

"Oh! De Laws, Miss Tennie!" cried Aunt Hannah, aghast. "I do 'no' nuffin 'bout pissols and gusses. Neber touch one in my life."

"You must now," said Tennie, decidedly; "or we shall all be killed and scalped in five minutes."

Her decisive tone prevented remonstrance, and the three women, great strapping washerwomen as they were, followed the young girl in perfect submission to her will.

Tennie ran to the stores in the center, and hurriedly selected three muskets, with the belts, with which she armed the three women. A lull in the firing outside enabled her to give some hurried instruction to the ignorant women, about the way to load and fire, with caution not to fire carelessly. Then she led the way to the empty wagons, outside the entrance, and posted the three women in the first of them, where they were sheltered from the fire of the Indians, with orders to shoot any one who came near the place, and then to reload.

It was just in time that she took the precaution. Peeping through a rent in the wagon-tilt, she perceived the cause of the lull in the firing. The Indians had been creeping round on that side, and were quite close to them.

Tennie leveled her light rifle, and shot one man, just as he was rising to his feet. Snatching Aunt Hannah's musket, she poked it through the rent, and fired at five or six men in a huddled group, who were hesitating as to advance or retreat. The second shot settled the matter. All that were left bolted for their horses.

Tennie fired a third shot after them, and went back in triumph to attend to her other duties. She found the men on the wall, cowed and despondent, from the almost impossibility of keeping covered while returning fire.

Tennie crept along under the shadow of the parapet, doing her best to encourage them, by telling them that the colonel would soon be back with help. In fact they could now hear the sound of the firing from his party, drawing nearer every moment.

Tennie herself set them a good example. She suddenly stood up in an unexpected part of the rampart, and took a deliberate aim at one of the advancing, creeping Indians. Before the enemy caught sight of her clearly, she had fired, and dropped down behind the rampart to reload. She might not have been so quick, had she known how little danger there was. Tiger Tail had forbidden any one to fire at that golden head of hers.

But the next moment came a heavy misfortune. One of the negroes, wishing to imitate her, stood suddenly up and took aim in like manner. His shot was successful, but before he could drop to reload, came a dozen answering cracks. The next moment the man threw up his arms with a loud shout of pain, and dropped back into the inclosure below, stone dead, shot through the heart.

The Indians gave a yell of triumph, and rose in a body, with a tremendous yell, firing a volley and running forward. The next moment, Tennie rose up with her three remaining companions, and fired into the advancing crowd. With a second yell, every Indian dropped flat on his face, and the advance was stayed.

Tennie Magoffin uttered a sigh of relief when they fell, and began to reload her rifle. The sun was setting, and the firing of the colonel's party rapidly growing nearer. Suddenly Tennie felt her skirt pulled, and turning round, saw her cousin Louisiana standing just below the platform.

Louie Dupre was very pale, but there was an expression of fixed resolve on her face for all that. She had a small silver-mounted revolver in a belt round her waist, and held a riding-whip in her hand.

"Tennie," she said in a low voice; "I'm going to cross the river and seek for help."

"What!" echoed Tennie, incredulously; "You

must be dreaming, Louie! They would shoot you before you could cross."

"They will not," said Louie, firmly; "Listen. I know the man at the head of yonder party. It is Antonio Miquelez, the Portuguese, who murdered Oscar Peyton. I am the prize he covets, ever since I spurned him and his love alike. I feel sure that he has murdered Eugene also, and joined these Indians. They will not fire at me."

"But they will chase you, Louie," said her cousin. "Oh, suppose that wretch catches you!"

"He will not catch me," said Louie, quietly. "My mare is swift, and if they should come up to me, and he should attempt to seize me, I will keep the last bullet from this pistol for my own heart, if I fail to kill him with the rest."

"But, I don't understand, Louie," said her cousin, doubtfully. "There is no help nearer than father, and you cannot reach him."

"I can draw away these creatures after me," said Louie, firmly; "and relieve you of a great peril. More I will not tell you; but I know that there is help beyond that river, and I am going to seek it."

As she spoke, her pale face glowed with a light, as if of inspiration.

"I shall bring help, coz," she said; and sprung away to the horses, that fed between the block-house and the river.

CHAPTER XIX.

TOO LATE.

THE nightly serenade of the coyotes is the constant companion of the prairie-traveler. The coyote seems to howl for his own amusement, or as a habit, and *only stops when disturbed*. Therefore is he an excellent sentry for the lonely trapper, warning him of the approach of strangers, whether human or quadruped, by the sudden silence that ensues.

The Regulators had gone into camp for the night, prairie-fashion. Their horses were herded close to them, with an armed sentry to stand guard over them, the animals themselves being hopped. Later they would be brought in, and picketed closer to their owners; but at present the men were gathered around the great fire, each cooking his supper, while the animals fed under the sentry's eye.

This supper was sufficiently simple. The carcasses of two animals lay on the ground near the fire, and each hunter drew his knife and cut off a slice for himself where he pleased, which he proceeded to toast upon his ramrod. The size of the slices depended on the appetite of the hunter, averaging from five to ten pounds. Indeed, it is astonishing, the quantity of meat which a hearty man, who has no other food, will consume.

The two carcasses that lay on the ground were unmistakably horses, young mustang colts, shot in the course of the day's march—young, juicy, and succulent.

"We must be getting close to the Cross Timbers, colonial," remarked Baptiste, as he cut chunks of his horse-meat.

"Yonder they are," said Hays, briefly, pointing with his thumb across the river to the dark line of timber beyond. "We shall come on your friend, Miquelez, to-morrow, I guess, if his pals haven't stampeded. But hark!" and Hays sprang to his feet. Listening a moment intently, he left the circle of hunters, going out on the plain a few yards. The coyotes had stopped howling—sure token that something or somebody approached.

Hays moved out still further, and threw himself down on the earth. He heard a low, distant rumble on the soft turf, which finally resolved itself into the regular hoof-beats of a galloping horse. The Regulator lay there listening, till he was convinced that the sounds were approaching him, and, furthermore, that other horses were following the first. The whole were coming from up-stream.

Hays jumped up and hastened back to the fire, scattering the brands and extinguishing the flames, leaving only red embers.

"Saddle up!" he cried, in clear, sharp tones; "something is up. They're chasing a fellow toward us. Hurry up, men."

The Regulators needed no more. In a moment each man had seized the trailing lariat and led his horse toward the saddle.

Saddle and bridle were alike lying in order, ready to snatch up. It took but a minute to throw on the rough horse-hair mat that served for a saddle blanket, draw the girth-strap through the rings, haul taut, and secure it. Hays himself was the first man on horseback, and rode out into the prairie, just as the galloping hoofs became plainly audible, and a view of

a dark figure, on a light-colored horse, could be caught through the gloom, galloping toward them.

"Fall in, men," said the sheriff, quietly; "don't mount till I give the order."

He rode forward himself to meet the newcomer, and to his astonishment, as he came near, he perceived that it was a lady, mounted on a white horse, spotted with black. The lady wore a dark riding-habit, and a hat with ostrich plumes, and dashed up alongside of him quite fearlessly.

"Who are you, sir, in the name of Heaven?" she asked, hurriedly; "will you defend me from my pursuers?"

"Certainly, madam," answered Hays, politely; "against all the tribes of the plains, if need be. I am Colonel Jack Hays, Sheriff of Texas, with the Regulators. Who is after you, madam?"

"Indians, sir," she said, quickly; "but they are headed by one who is far worse than any Indian, a Portuguese murderer, named Miquelez."

In his satisfaction at the news, Hays almost allowed an oath to escape him; but the native politeness of the borderer stifled it, ere it passed him.

"Madam," said the Regulator, quickly, "you have brought us the best news that I ever heard. We are after that very man. Where is he now?"

"He must be some way behind, sir," she said; "my horse is very swift. I saw your fire, and galloped toward it. But—"

"Hush!" said Hays, suddenly. "Listen!"

He lifted his hand in an attitude of attention, and the lady listened with him. The sound of many horse-hoofs was plainly audible on the prairie, but all in a moment there was a confused beating and scrambling, and the sounds stopped.

"They have pulled up," said Hays, in a low voice. "They must have caught sight of our fire. We shall have to chase them. What made you ride down our way, madam?"

"I heard your bugle, sir, about sunset," answered Louisiana Dupre, for it was she. "It came to me twice on the wind, and I thought you were much nearer than you were. I have ridden full speed, for almost an hour."

"Indeed," said the sheriff. "You must have good hearing, madam!"

"I feared to tell my friends what I heard," said Louie; "they would not have believed me. But I heard it plainly for one moment. I thought it must be United States soldiers. But you, sir—have you heard no firing since sunset?"

"Not a shot, madam," said Hays. "Is there fighting going on?"

"About ten miles from here, sir," she answered. "My uncle, Colonel Magoffin, is fighting a band of Indians, headed by one Tiger Tail, a Seminole."

"Better and better!" said Hays; "madam, you have done nobly to-night. Before morning your friends shall be safe. Where are they?"

On the other side of the river, sir," she said; "I swam the stream on my horse, and attracted many of the Indians in pursuit, but heaven only knows how many were left. Pray, sir, shall we not start now?"

"There is no hurry, madam," said Hays, who had been listening intently during the whole of this conversation; "your pursuers have halted. They don't like the sparks of fire here, and fear to advance, but don't like to fly. They can't tell how many we are. You'll see that, if we keep quiet, they'll come on, and the closer we get them, the better off we shall be when it comes to a race. Now let us listen, if you please."

The whole party preserved a dead silence for some minutes, during which there was equal quiet on the prairie without. Hays finally threw his rifle over his arm, and, leaving his horse behind, moved off into the darkness to reconnoiter. Louie took hold of his horse's bridle as naturally as could be, and without asking.

The figure of the Regulator chief was seen for some minutes, slowly advancing in a crouching posture, rifle in hand. Then he dropped to the earth, and disappeared from view in the darkness.

Louie waited, all attention. The Regulators stood at their horses' heads like black statues. The only sound heard was the occasional snort of a charger, and a low murmur of distant voices, from Louie's baffled pursuers.

The girl knew well that, out there in the darkness, was the man who had murdered Oscar Peyton, her betrothed. No beard could hide him from her. She had recognized him in a moment. Her daring ride had been executed with the express object of drawing him off from

the block-house, and it had succeeded so far. Would he be captured now?

While she sat on her horse, thinking these thoughts, and striving to pierce the darkness with her eyes, the distant murmur of voices ceased. Every man among the Regulators, silent and without orders, prepared to mount his horse.

Louie involuntarily straightened up in her saddle, and trembled with excitement and chill combined. Her long skirts were not dry yet, from her swim in the river, and the night air was cold. Suddenly, she heard a distant voice, from the party of her pursuers, utter a cry in the Indian language. The next minute there was a bright flash in the darkness ahead, and the report of a rifle followed.

Up sprang the Regulators to their horses, just as a yell burst from the darkness, followed by the flashes of forty or fifty rifles, all in a clump in the plain, some quarter of a mile off.

But as soon as the first volley was off, it was answered by five distinct flashes, from the same point as the first, and the cries of anger and pain which followed from the Indians, showed that the repeating-rifle of Colonel Jack Hays had not been aimed in vain at the crowded mass of his enemies.

Then a clear, sharp voice shouted back:

"Forward, boys. Don't fire a shot!"

Louie shook her rein and dashed forward; while the Regulators, all together, uttered a tremendous yell, and swept down toward the spot where the flash of their leader's rifle told them he was. In a moment they were up to him, while the Indians, never waiting the attack, were heard galloping off into the darkness at full speed, and in total silence.

There was a momentary halt around the sheriff, as he mounted his horse, but not for long. The active borderer leaped into his saddle, and led the pursuit at a round pace, after the sound of the fugitives' horsehoofs.

Louie Dupre was beside him, her fleet little mare keeping up gallantly with the foremost, and away they went over the prairie.

But before long the sound of the horse-hoofs in front of her became fainter and fainter, while it spread out to the right and left, as if the fugitives were scattering.

"Where are your friends?" called out Hays to Louie, at this time, as they galloped along, his voice nearly drowned in the thunder of hoofs.

"Up the river," answered Louie, in the same tone, and pointing that way as she spoke.

"Can't catch these fellows to-night," cried Hays, in accents broken by the rapid motion; "must do the best we can. Chase straight up-stream."

So up the river they went at full speed, keeping only some two or three fugitives in their front, whom they slowly gained upon. But half an hour's such riding brought them within hearing of the fight that still raged around the block-house, and in sight of a line of watchfires, built by the Indians in a circle around the place they were besieging.

The flashes of rifles from the line of the block-house were so numerous, that Louie thought her uncle must have reached the place in safety, and she briefly explained the fact to Hays as they galloped along.

"How many men has your uncle got?" he asked, abruptly.

"About twelve or fourteen, sir," said Louie; "if Mr. Carrol and Thornley are with him, which I think, there are fifteen at least."

"Carrol! What Carrol! Wash Carrol!" asked the sheriff.

"Yes, sir," panted Louie, out of breath from rapid riding.

"Are there any wagons?"

"Two, sir. They began to build a block house, but—"

"Humph!" muttered Hays to himself, with a grunt just like an Indian. It was his only exclamation of any kind, except a very rare oath.

The exclamation was called forth by the sudden bursting out of a bright flame on the summit of the knoll where the block-house stood. It rose higher and higher, the dark frame of the square edifice standing out boldly in relief against it, with several moving figures above the rampart. The fire proceeded from the two wagons which were drawn up by the entrance, both of which were in a bright blaze.

No sooner was the flame fairly alight than a simultaneous volley came from all quarters from the besiegers, and two of the figures on the ramparts were seen to toss their arms up and fall back.

"Faster, men, faster!" cried Hays, for the first time seeming to be excited, as he spurred

his horse violently. They had been riding at an easy gallop so far, but now the whole party strained every nerve, and swept on at full speed.

They had need to, if they had wished to help the beleaguered settlers. As soon as the volley had been fired a simultaneous rush was made from all quarters toward the block-house, amid yells that could be plainly heard, even at that distance.

The Regulators dashed on as hard as they could go. Louie whipped her game little mare till the creature seemed as if she would leap out of her skin. But faster than all their rush was the desperate assault of the Indians, who seemed to be determined to succeed at any hazard, contrary to their usual cautious tactics.

They rushed on in a regular wave, which overflowed the block-house. There was seen a dense crowd close to the burning wagons, and then the echoes of the firing became a complete rattle from inside the edifice, mingled with yells, shouts, cries, and female shrieks, as the desperate conflict began inside.

"Yell, men! Yell!" cried Hays, at this moment. "'Tis our only chance to save them. Yell like the devil! 'Twill scare the Indians!"

As he spoke he fired a barrel of his revolver in the air toward the distant blaze, and the Regulators raised a stentorian yell, firing a whole volley at an angle of forty-five, in the hope that something might reach the Indians.

Ten minutes more and they were down by the banks of the stream, the water glowing in the red light of the fires, while the shouts and cries from the block-house were growing less and less. Hays dashed his horse into the ford, and splashed across, followed by his men, Louie in the midst of them, pale and trembling, but still firmly resolved to struggle on to save her friends.

Several Indians came rushing down the further bank to oppose them, firing hastily into the water. But a volley of revolver-shots, and the sight of the formidable number of the Regulators, changed their fight into a flight in a single moment.

Yelling and firing as they went, the borderers plunged through, and climbed up the steep bank beyond as they best could. But the bank proved a more formidable obstacle than the foe. It caved in in so many places, and gave them so much trouble, that it was fully ten minutes more of riding up and down to find a better place to climb, before they succeeded in reaching the top by twos and threes, and galloping down to the block-house.

But when they arrived at the top at last, it was empty of foes. The block-house stood silent before them; the burning wagons were falling into glowing brands, and not an Indian was to be seen. Jack Hays ran up to the block-house, and shouted:

"Hilloo! in there! Who's alive?"

A faint voice answered:

"Very few, neighbor."

CHAPTER XX.

THE BLOCK-HOUSE.

THE sight that met the sheriff's eyes was sufficiently horrible.

Men, women, and children; white, red, and black, lay huddled together in the little inclosure, dead and dying, in heaps. The dead were all scalped, except the Indian portion of them, and were principally negroes, especially women and children. One white man, a huge, Herculean fellow, in "butternut" clothes, lay on top of the heap, however, stone dead.

His rough, black beard bristled out from his chin, stiff and horrible-looking, and his glazed eyes and grinning teeth gave an expression of grim fierceness to the dead countenance, that caused an involuntary shudder. The giant's hands were both tightly clenched, each in the long hair of an Indian warrior, whose faces were all mashed out of shape.

His own scalp had been taken, and a deep cleft in the back of his head, showed how he had been killed.

Hays looked round in some surprise.

"Where are the rest of you?" he asked, aloud.

"Who called to me, just now?"

"I did," said the same voice, from a corner of the block-house. "Kurn't git out, stranger, or I'd shake hands. Come and help me out, ef ye kin. This chile's the only critter left alive hyar, I do b'lieve."

Hays advanced to the corner of the block-house, and discovered the body of a man, lying with three dead Indians on him, from whom he was unable to extricate himself.

The man's face was seamed with a broad scar,

the mark of some former fight, and Hays recognized Wash Carrol.

"That you, Wash?" was all he said; and proceeded to drag off the bodies of the slain Indians from the prostrate hunter.

When Wash Carrol was relieved of his burden, he rose slowly to his feet, and surveyed his deliverer.

"Is that you, sheriff?" he asked. "Lord alive! Ef we'd 'a' know'd that, we mought hev be'n alive now, me and my neighbor thar. They c'd never ha' flummoxed us as they hev, ef we'd 'a' kep' the cunnel hyar, and the other fellers."

At this moment, Louisiana Dupre ran into the block-house, and saw Wash standing there alone. She uttered a wild shriek, and ran forward, crying:

"My uncle! Tennie! My brother! Where are they, Mr. Carrol? Oh! are they killed?"

"No, miss," said Wash, eagerly. "They're across the river, a-hidin' in a motte, I guess. Me and Strother was all the white folkses hyar, and all the rest of us is dead."

"But where is my uncle?" cried Louie, wildly. "Where is my brother? Where is Tennie? How came they to leave here?"

"They slipped off arter dark, miss," said Wash, "along wi' Miss Tennie, yer cousin. 'Twar I as told 'em to do it, 'cause I know'd as how Tiger Tail wanted the young lady, and we was bound as how he shouldn't hev her. Thar, over yonder, she be, in one o' them mottes, and ef the Injuns don't git over thar, thur she's safe."

"Which motte are they in?" demanded Hays, quickly; "and how many of them are there?"

"There are only the cunnel, and Mister Eugene, and Miss Tennie. Ed. Thornley, my pardner, ez soon ez ever he h'ard that Miss Louie, hyar, hed rid off on sich a chase, he goes off like a madman to find her, and whar he are at this present time is more than I kin say. Ed kin take care o' himself, I guess, ef he kurn't find Miss Louie."

"Well," said Hays, gravely, "you people have made precious fools of yourselves, scattering in this way. I'll have hard work to find you all. Are you hurt much, Wash?"

"Reckon I am," said the mustanger, faintly; "I knifed all three o' them cusses in the scrimmage, but I got two or three plugs myself, I guess. Poor Strother, thar, he got hold o' two on 'em, and smashed thur durned brains out together. He war an orful strong cuss, anyhow, he war."

The sound of a shot fired across the river, and a regular Indian yell, at this moment startled every one.

Jack Hays stamped his foot angrily, and muttered:

"I thought so. The stragglers have got them."

He ran outside, and went to the edge of the bank to look across the river. The light of the burning wagons was reflected on the figures of several people on horseback, galloping down to the ford, pursued by the very Indians he had but lately pursued himself.

Louie Dupre came out after him, and recognized the figures of her brother, her uncle, and Tennie, just as they leaped into the river, with the Indians hard after them.

But whose was that form, mounted on a black steed and dressed like a Mexican ranchero, who headed the Indians?

Louisiana Dupre shuddered and shrieked as she recognized the evil spirit, Antonio Miquelez, and saw that he was whirling a lasso over his head. The next minute it flew far out over the water, and hovered over the head of poor Tennie Magoffin.

There was a shriek from the unhappy girl, and then the gazers saw her plucked from her horse, and whisked toward the shore in an instant, while the colonel and Eugene turned their horses, and rushed desperately on, to meet the terrible odds against them, but in vain.

Louie saw the Indians rush forward and close around her cousin, beating off the frantic father, and shooting both the horses of the white men down. Then poor Tennie was dragged up from the ground, and placed upon the pommel of the Black Mustanger's saddle, when the whole party rode off across the prairie, and down-stream, with a yell of loud triumph. Colonel Magoffin was seen to run forward on foot, firing his revolver, but the shots were not answered, and the poor father fell to the earth at last, hopeless and despairing.

But at this sight quiet Jack Hays suddenly aroused himself, and swore the only oath he was ever known to utter.

"Now, by the God who sees me," he said, in a deep voice, "I'll have that girl back, and kill

that fellow, if it takes every horse in my command. Young lady, you stay here. I'll leave two men to guard you in this place. No answer. I must be obeyed now."

He spoke very differently from what he had. In five minutes more, headed by their redoubtable leader, the Regulators were crashing down the bank into the river, after the fast-vanishing forms of Miquelez and the Indians.

CHAPTER XXI.

THE LASSO CAST.

OUT on the dark prairie beyond the river, at the same time that the Regulators dashed down the bank, a single horseman drew rein at the edge of a motte, about a mile further down, and uttered a groan of disappointment, as he looked at the distant blaze of the burning wagons.

"Too late!" he muttered to himself. "I have ridden all this distance, and lost my way among the mottes, for nothing. I can not find her. It was some other track which I must have followed. Where is she now? Perhaps taken by that lustful devil, Tiger Tail, and at his mercy, while all her family is slaughtered yonder; and I have left my comrade like a fool. What can I do? What shall I do? What ought I to do? Blow out my own brains, most likely."

He sat on his horse, bitterly musing, and watching the flames, as if uncertain what to do. It was Edward Thornley, who, just as soon as he had heard from Tennie Magoffin, when he and Wash Carrol arrived at the block-house, of Louie's rash ride, had instantly plunged down the bank, regardless of danger, and swum the river, the Indian bullets whistling round him.

Searching for her, he had lost his way, and emerged in sight of the river, having by a marvel escaped the scattered Indians of Miquelez's party. Now he dismounted from his horse, and stood watching the flames, wondering what had become of Louie, when he was startled by the sound of the gallop of horses near him. With a vague instinct of self-preservation, he drew back into the motte, and beheld a party of mounted Indians pull up close to him, and stand still, listening.

At their head, to his intense surprise, he recognized the form of his late partner, Louis Lebar, easily distinguished from the rest by the broad hat and coarse profile, relieved against the starlight.

Lebar held across his saddle-bow a female figure, and Edward felt his heart throb desperately at the bare possibility of who it might be. For a moment he was tempted to shoot his partner, but the number of Lebar's followers rendered such a feat too rash for success. He grasped his horse by the nostrils, to prevent its neighing, and listened.

Presently he heard Lebar say, in English, to his captive:

"You may thank your stars, young lady, that you were not scalped long ago. Those cursed Regulators have robbed me of your cousin, but Tiger Tail and I will take our revenge out of you. You need not look back. I have thrown out the pursuers a second time, for all their smartness. There they go now, the fools, after another man, with a bundle in a blanket before him, to represent you, while I carry you in my arms, my dainty Miss Magoffin."

Thornley shuddered with aversion as he listened, but he could tell that Lebar's words were true, for the sound of other horses at full gallop, and the jingle of bridles at some distance further toward the river, announced that the pursuers, whoever they were, were passing by. For the first time, the young mustanger learned that Louie had succeeded in her dangerous enterprise, and that the famous Regulators were near at hand.

Two hours ago, under the same circumstances, he would have fired at Lebar, dashed out to rescue Tennie, and lost his life without saving her; but his long and disappointing ride had recalled to the young man all the coolness and woodcraft he ever possessed; and he resolved to wait, and watch his opportunity to do substantial service.

Lebar laughed sardonically, as he listened to the sound of the horse-hoofs, dying away in the distance.

"There they go, Miss Magoffin," he said, "on a wild-goose chase after a blanket, and you can't scream, my pretty Tennie, because I'll choke you if you try it. By heavens! if it were not that I have promised you to my friend, Tiger Tail, I should feel very much tempted to take you for a substitute for your cousin; but then these fellows would tell Tiger Tail, and I don't care to offend him just yet. I want his help to carry off your pretty cousin. So I won't even

taste those red lips of yours, but will go quietly along to my friend's stronghold, in the very midst of the Cross Timbers, and let who can, find us."

Thornley never stirred in all this time, though he listened anxiously to hear if Tennie answered. But the high-spirited girl did not utter a single word, which she knew would only meet with fresh insult.

Pretty soon, Lebar observed, in English:

"Well, boys, we'll go now, I think."

He added some instructions in Seminole, which Thornley did not understand, and the whole band moved off at a walk, on the trail of the very men who were after them. The mustanger waited till they were some distance ahead, when he mounted and followed, taking care to keep his horse in the shadow of the mottes that were on his way.

He followed for about two miles, when Lebar turned round and rode toward the river. Thornley perceived, from the lay of the land, that they were opposite to the camp of Tiger Tail, which he had visited that morning, and judged that Lebar's intention must be to go there. Just as the renegade turned toward the river, they heard the sound of shots far ahead, where the deceived Regulators, no doubt, were.

As soon as Lebar heard the sound, he rode rapidly to the river-bank, with all his men, and entered the water. The firing from the Regulators soon ceased, and Thornley judged that they must have overtaken the fleeing Indian, and probably shot him, and discovered their mistake ere this.

He remained closely watching the retiring Indians, till the gallop of approaching horses told him that his suspicions were correct.

At the sound of the returning hunters, Lebar's men halted on the other side of the river. They were invisible, but Thornley could tell it, by the cessation of the noise of hoofs. He moved out from the motte-side, and stood in the path of the Texans.

They came dashing up, and he was quickly surrounded by several suspicious Regulators.

Thornley, never moving his eyes from the motte, under whose shadow he knew the Indians to be standing, told his name, and the news which he had to communicate.

"The Indians out yonder have got Miss Magoffin," he said; "and if you want to take them, I would recommend you to stop right here till morning. If you chase them now, they may get off into the bushes and escape, but they won't dare to stir, for fear of being heard, if you stay on this side of the river, and pretend not to know they are there."

Hays reflected a moment, when he admitted that the advice was good, and he and Thornley concocted their plan.

This settled, Thornley, Hays, and twenty of the best mounted borderers, rode off toward the block-house, leaving the lieutenant of the band to watch the Indians.

CHAPTER XXII.

THE CHASE.

WITHIN the heart of that scrubby barrier, in a clearing evidently the work of art, was collected the camp of Tiger Tail's tribe, lodges pitched and fires burning, in complete security. An impenetrable wall of wood surrounded them, all the secret openings of which were hidden behind screens of bushes. From the level and falling ground all round, the Cross Timbers being the highest part of the country, this arrangement was effectual. The smoke from the fires was quite invisible on the prairie.

The camp of Tiger Tail was empty of warriors, and only full of squaws and children.

The warriors of the tribe were gathered by the bank of the river, opposite to the band of Regulators, only about fifty strong, on the opposite bank.

Miquelez, seeing his enemies divided, as the morning dawned, had sent back the news to Tiger Tail, who had brought down all his warriors, now reduced to about a hundred and thirty, to dispute the river passage, and chastise the borderers, if he could.

But in the rear of these again, and entirely unsuspected, was a third party.

This consisted of Sheriff Hays, Colonel Magoffin, his nephew and niece, Edward Thornley and Wash Carrol, the latter pale and weak-looking, from fatigue and loss of blood.

This party was slowly approaching the scene of action from the direction of the corral of the mustangers. That corral remained intact, the Indians having neglected to stampede its inmates as yet, and Thornley had availed himself of the fact to provide fresh horses for himself, the colonel, and Eugene.

Thornley had selected the best horse that was left, for himself—the very steel-gray stallion which Lebar had failed to capture the day before. He knew from its appearance that it must be speedy, and he fancied that, very probably, he might yet have to try a hard race with the desperate Miquelez.

During the night he had learned the true character of his late partner, and made up his mind to capture him with the lasso, at any risk.

When he rode cautiously forward with the brightening dawn, there lay the river below him, and the Indians were all dismounted on the near bank, their horses standing behind the shelter of a motte, at least two hundred yards back. The only mounted persons were Tiger Tail and the dark murderer, Miquelez, and a single female figure. Thornley needed no diviner to tell him who that was. The girl was seated upon a mustang pony, her arms tied behind her, and secured on the animal's back by stout thongs of buffalo-hide.

Thornley heard a low exclamation beside him, and turning, beheld Eugene Dupre close to him, his face pale as ashes, his eyes blazing, as he was about to spring forward without orders, when the sharp voice of Sheriff Hays retained him.

"See here, young man," said Jack, sternly; "you keep quiet till I give the word to move. I boss this job, and I'm not in the habit of making mistakes, either."

Eugene restrained his horse, though he looked longingly down toward the combat that was about to commence.

"Now, boys," said the sheriff, quietly, "spread along behind this crest, and don't a man move till I give the word. Then charge, and keep your fire, till you can see the whites of their eyes."

The borderers quietly obeyed the order, riding out into a thin skirmish-line behind the crest of the swell. There they waited, hidden away, till the sound of shots below announced that the fight was opened there.

Thornley, peeping cautiously over the brow of the hill, beheld the body of Regulators opposite riding down into the river, and opening fire on the Indians. The Indians, went running out of the motte on foot, to meet them, firing and yelling, and in two minutes the fight became general.

As soon as the sheriff saw that the Indians were too busy to notice, he gave the signal to charge; and down the hill swept his party—Hays himself far in advance, on a thoroughbred charger, with a revolver in each hand.

The Indians, taken in front and rear, and by surprise, offered not the shadow of resistance from that moment. With one accord they broke and fled toward their horses.

But Hays's party swooped down on the horses with a yell, and reached them long before their owners. The cracking of revolvers, shouts, curses and yells, made a perfect Pandemonium of the river-bank for some minutes, as the Seminoles, hemmed in on every side, and driven to desperation, sold their lives as dearly as they could.

In the midst of all the confusion, Edward Thornley and Eugene Dupre were only sensible of three persons in the melee, and these were Tiger Tail, Miquelez, and Tennie Magoffin.

At the very first yell of the borderers in the rear, Tiger Tail seized Tennie's rein, and turned both horses' heads to the westward. Miquelez cast a single glance backward, and then set spurs to his steed, and fled along with them.

While Hays and the Regulators dashed into the fight with the Indians, Thornley and Eugene pressed forward, both with the same object. Away they went, at full speed on the track of the fugitives, Eugene brandishing a revolver, Thornley gathering the coils of the silent but deadly lasso in his hand, as he went.

In three minutes more they were out of the fight, and rapidly gaining on the wearied steeds of the fugitives.

Toward the west, the prairie was open for some miles, but then it ended abruptly in the main body of the Cross Timbers itself, the only outlet being a narrow passage between the timber and the river.

Toward this narrow passage did Miquelez and Tiger Tail direct their steps, carrying with them their helpless prisoner.

Eugene Dupre uttered a violent curse of rage as he saw Tiger Tail look mockingly back at him, and wave his hand in triumph as he went. He dug his spurs into his animal until it seemed to fly, and felt himself creeping slowly but surely up. Behind him he could still hear the shouts and shots of the fight, and then it all faded away.

Thornley rode a little in advance, not urging

his horse much at first, but still gaining, from superior speed. The further they went, the oftener Miquelez and Tiger Tail turned to look. They seemed to be trying to make up their minds to resist; and at last, when they were within a quarter of a mile of the Timbers, both pulled up. Miquelez pulled out a pistol, and held it close to Tennie Magoffin's head, shouting:

"Go back, you accursed fools, or I'll shoot the girl!"

Eugene pulled up his horse in an instant, pale with fear.

But Thornley never halted in his course. He came thundering on, with a tremendous shout, that so unsteadied the nerves of Miquelez, that he involuntarily turned the pistol on the person of the mustanger. He fired hastily, and without aim, and the bullet whistled harmlessly by Thornley's temple. The next minute down came Eugene at full speed, with presented pistol, firing shot after shot at the murderer. They whistled so closely that Miquelez gave way. He was a coward, after all, and the next minute showed it: for he turned his horse's head and fled, leaving Tiger Tail alone to dispute the way.

Tiger Tail drew up his horse, and leveled his rifle. He had no pistol, and but one barrel to his rifle.

As Thornley passed him by, only intent on Miquelez, the Indian snapped the weapon at him harmlessly, and the next moment Eugene Dupre ran his horse full tilt against the chief, sending horse and rider to the earth together, and falling over them himself.

The last glimpse that Thornley caught of the two, they were rolling on the prairie, struggling like two dogs. Then he forgot all else, in the knowledge of the fact that his treacherous partner, Antonio Miquelez, alias Louis Lebar, was within lasso-distance.

How carefully he wound the lasso round his head now! He would not have missed that cast for a fortune.

With a nervous swing, and a loud shout of anger, he finally flung it through the air, saw it hover a moment, in a perfect circle, over the murderer's head, and down over the shoulders of the doomed man it fell, pinioning his arms to his sides, as the lariat tightened.

The gray stallion was round on his haunches in a moment, under the powerful Spanish bit, and Antonio Miquelez was plucked from his saddle with the shock of a thunderbolt, and sent rolling over on the prairie, helpless and stunned.

"Throw away that pistol," shouted Thornley, sternly, keeping the lasso tautly stretched, while he spoke; "drop it, or I'll drag you into court as you are."

The discomfited ruffian dropped the pistol, but then he began to beg and plead piteously.

"Oh! Edward Thornley," he said, "isn't this a hard trick to serve a comrade and partner? What have I ever done to you that you should treat me so?"

"To me, nothing," said Thornley, gravely; "but you are a murderer, Antonio Miquelez, and here come your judges, the Regulators of Texas!"

"Oh! for God's sake, Thornley!" screamed the frightened wretch, "don't give me up to them! They'll kill me without trial."

"What for?" asked Thornley, sternly; "they hang only murderers and horse-thieves. You are a murderer!"

"I killed him only in self-defense!" shrieked Miquelez, desperately; "let me up, Edward Thornley, I say! What right have you to keep me here, curse you!"

And as he spoke, hearing the horse-hoofs of the approaching Regulators, he struggled desperately to cast off the encircling noose of the lasso, in the mad hope of escaping to the cover of the timber.

But it was all in vain.

He half-scrambled to his feet, only to be plucked back and dragged violently forward some fifty feet, as Thornley touched his horse with the spur. The yells for pity of the unhappy wretch faded into awe-stricken moans of pain and terror as he saw around him, when he halted, nothing but the pitiless, bearded faces of the Regulators, with a single dark, Indian-looking countenance, that he recognized instantly as that of Baptiste Ledoux, a trapper of Louisiana, who knew him well.

Then he realized that it was all over, as far as he was concerned; and he lay still and sullen on the ground, awaiting his fate.

CHAPTER XXIII.

HOW IT WAS ARRANGED.

TIGER TAIL went over, horse and all, and Eugene fell over him, and found himself locked in the grasp of the athletic young Indian, who was

trying to draw his knife. Dupre caught him by the throat with the left hand, and showered blows on the chief's head with the barrel of his pistol, as fast and hard as he could lay them on.

The chief ducked his head, receiving the blows on the matted hair on his crown, and soon mastered the Creola, rolling him over on the prairie. Eugene struggled manfully and well. But Tiger Tail had already drawn his knife; and wreathing his hand in Eugene's hair, thrust back his head with a savage growl, and lifted the knife to strike.

The Creola thought his last hour was come, when shouts and the galloping of horses near by disturbed the chief, and Tiger Tail wavered and looked up.

In an instant more came the sharp crack of a pistol close by.

Tiger Tail uttered a hideous yell, and leaped up, falling over on his back on the grass, stone dead, the blood gushing from a hole over his heart.

Eugene staggered to his feet to see the Regulators rushing past him at full speed, in chase of Tinnie Magoffin's mustang, which they caught at a hundred yards off.

Eugene hurried up and found them all standing round the prostrate body of Miquelez, who lay on his face, sullen and motionless.

One of the borderers had cut Tinnie's bonds, and the girl welcomed his face, the only familiar one to her, with a burst of gladness that wonderfully elated simple Eugene.

And now, by twos and threes, the Regulators came galloping up, followed by Colonel Magoffin and Louisiana Dupre, who had been watching the fight in safety from the rear.

Great was the rejoicing between the reunited cousins as they met, and Thornley sighed deeply, with involuntary envy, as he saw the kisses so freely bestowed upon the restored brother by Louie, who had seen his perilous struggle with the Indian chief.

But Hays soon recalled them to a sense of the more terrible part of the business, when he said: "Colonel Magoffin, you are aware, I suppose, that we have found the man after whom our band came here, Antonio Miquelez, the murderer of Mr. Oscar Peyton, of Louisiana. Here he is." And he pointed to Miquelez.

Two of the stalwart Regulators had dismounted and raised him from the ground, while they tied his hands behind his back with a stout thong of deer-skin. The prisoner made no resistance, only he kept his eyes riveted on Louisiana Dupre in a way that made her shiver. Colonel Magoffin looked at him with disgust.

"I see the man," he said. "He has come out here to seek safety from his crimes, but God has directed me here to see him punished. I do not know him myself, but my nephew and niece recognize him perfectly."

"I do," assented Eugene, in a low voice. "It is the same man who murdered poor Oscar Peyton, and threw him into the bayou. They went out shooting in company, and a charge of buckshot, with his mark stamped upon them, was found in the poor fellow's back when they recovered the body from the water."

"Are you willing to swear to this, young man?" asked Hays. "If so, we shall have a short trial. Bring the prisoner back, men."

The whole party took up their homeward march to the motte where the fight had begun, where they found about twenty Indian prisoners, the sole survivors of the fight and massacre.

Here a court was organized in regular style, the lieutenant of the borderers acting as judge, and twelve of the men composing a jury.

Baptiste Ledoux and Eugene Dupre testified to finding the body of Oscar Peyton shot in the back with slugs, which were stamped with Miquelez's private mark.

The prisoner was asked if he had anything to say. He scowled at Eugene, and answered:

"Not much. My time's come. I shot Oscar Peyton, because I hated him. He loved that young fool's sister, and so did I. He was a soft milksop of a fellow, educated for the church, and she was engaged to be married to him. I swore that she never should, and she never shall. If you smart fellows hadn't come up when you did, I should have had her and her dainty cousin there. Now, curse you all! Do your worst! I've said my say."

There was a low murmur of disgust around the circle, and the judge asked:

"Is there any one here wants to say anything why this fellow shouldn't be swung up?"

There was no answer.

"Well, then," pursued the judge, "we'll take the votes of the jury. What say you? Is this man guilty or not guilty?"

Without a single dissenting voice, each man

uttered his verdict, so dreadful when heard at the close of a trial for murder:

"GUILTY."

Then the judge said:

"Prisoner, you've been tried by prairie law. You ain't had no chance to git off on a quibble. You killed the poor fellow, and you owned up. I sentence you to be hung, right off, to that tree, and the Lord have mercy on your soul!"

And he rose from his seat on a fallen log, and stretched himself with great satisfaction. The Regulator jury yawned in chorus. It was old work to them.

"Come, colonel," said Hays, in a quiet tone to Magoffin; "let's be off to your shanty. My fellows will rush this funeral through without us. The ladies are not used to this sort of thing."

Magoffin bowed, with a grateful look to the borderer for his considerate kindness.

"Come, Tinnie. Come, Louie," he said, sadly. "Our little home is made desolate enough, I fear; but you are still left, my children, and that is much. Let us go."

They rode over the plain toward the desolate ruins of the wagons and block-house, with sad hearts. In one day, all their little household goods had been scattered to the winds, and their negroes were all killed and scalped.

Wash Carrol rode with them, trying, in his rough way, to console the colonel.

"Never mind, curnel," he said. "This hyar ain't as bad as it mout be. Yer all left alive, what's white; and me and my kumrad hyar, we'll buckle to and help yer. Besides, Curnel Hays and his boys ain't the fellers to let you stay here, without helpin' yer a bit, and ye kin scratch along till yer cotton's riz."

"Ah! Wash!" said Magoffin, sadly, "I have no hands now to raise cotton. I left the poor faithful fellows to defend themselves, and what's the consequence? They were all butchered. If I had stayed there, it might not have been."

"See hyar, curnel," said Wash, stoutly, "I made yer do that ar'. Ef yer'd a-staid thar', you and Miss Tinnie would 'a' been skulped. That's sartin. Now, here's Sheriff Hays 'll tell you what to do."

"I think, colonel," said Hays, "that there is no need to despair. You have lost all your negroes and three empty wagons, but the Indians had no time to touch the stuff in the block-house, and your cattle were quite uninjured, when I saw them. My fellows and I will help you finish your block-house and stockade, and you can turn stock-farmer, if you will. It needs very few hands, and you will have all these Indian ponies, and your own cattle to commence with. Many a man has come to riches in Texas, on smaller beginnings."

"And, colonel," said young Thornley, blushing, "if you wouldn't think it a liberty, Wash Carrol and I will join stocks with you, and make a big corral for all our horses together. Poor Wash is too badly hurt to be able to travel with me to Nacogdoches; and I think that if we break these mustangs to harness, we can sell them for a good price."

As Thornley said this his heart beat hard, for fear of a refusal; and he carefully avoided looking at Louie Dupre, the very one on whose account the proposition was made. Colonel Magoffin made no reply for some time, and Thornley began to fear he was to be refused, when, glancing at the colonel, he observed the big warrior's face working.

Magoffin rode alongside presently, and held out his hand.

"Mr. Thornley," he said, in a choked voice, "I see your kindness, and I thank you for it. Sir, you are a true gentleman. But I cannot consent that you should forego your prospects in life to help an old man, who has nothing left in the world now but his daughter and niece."

"And I tell you, sir," said Thornley, obstinately, "that I have made up my mind to settle here for good and all, even if I have to live alone with old Wash here."

"Yes, curnel," said that worthy himself. "Me and Ed, we hev fixed it, quite permiscus, as I may say. We're a-goin' to settle down hyar, like a kuppel o' jolly bachelors, seem' as the plains is ruined for huntin' anyway, and it's settle or move on with us, all the time. I'm gettin' e'en a'most tired o' movin', and having folkses comin' arter me; so hyar I stay."

Finally Magoffin gave in to the plan with much gratitude; and the very same day operations were commenced.

What fourteen pair of hands had begun, over a hundred finished. Knowing Jack Hays even impressed the Indian prisoners into the work of hauling logs to finish the block-house, and inclosing a point of the river with a strong stockade. The Indians were only too glad to pur-

chase their liberty by a few days' work, and a week after, everything was complete.

A strong block-house of green wood, perfectly fireproof, and soddied to make it more so, towered at the corner of a strong-spiked stockade, loopholed all along the top, with a bank of earth thrown up inside, for the defenders to stand on.

A tract of nearly a hundred acres was inclosed as a corral, with strong snake fence, strengthened at the corners, while the animals could be driven within the stockade at night. The two mustangers drove their captured animals with but little trouble, by twos and threes, into the outside corral, and then the Regulators left them in peace and safety.

Their own task still remained to the Regulators being nothing less than the transportation of Tiger Tail's predatory band back to the Seminole reservation in the Indian territory. This they accomplished without any more difficulty.

All the captured horses, except sufficient for the absolute necessities of the Indians, were turned into Colonel Magoffin's corral, to compensate him for his losses.

The poor negroes and the brave overseer were buried decently. As Wash Carrol stood by Strother's grave, he emphatically remarked:

"You war a man, neighbor; you war. I never see'd a better in all the scrimmages I ever fit in. You smashed out their durned brains wi' yer bare hands, and that's more nor most men kin say."

What more is there to tell? Any of our readers must surmise the truth by this time. How sweet Louie Dupre, in course of time, so far forgot her grief for the lost Oscar, as to look without displeasure on the silent, earnest homage of Edward Thornley, and at last to own a fluttering feeling of liking, regard, pity, friendship, love, in gradual succession, for that happy individual. How Thornley made a trip to the States and returned, with all his worldly belongings invested in blood horses and cattle, to improve the common stock. How the stock increased and multiplied, year by year, till Magoffin's ranch numbered its herds by the thousand. How Eugene became an ardent stock-raiser, and finally married pretty Tinnie Magoffin, and became the father of a stock of a different kind, while Wash Carrol was "master of the horse."

All this and more too, my readers can imagine, and still be short of the mark.

Mrs. Edward Thornley, nee Dupre, is quite cheerful now, and often thanks Heaven for the chance that brought her in contact with honest Wash Carrol and her husband, and saved her from THE BLACK MUSTANGER.

THE END.

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